

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL: SUBJECT UNIT 5J: INNOVATION MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

12 October 2017

PANEL: Professor P Moore, Head of School of Communication and Media, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr G Taggart, Head of School of Science, Letterkenny Institute of Technology
Dr J Condell, School of Computing and Engineering, Ulster University
Mr A McAnallen, Students' Union Officer, Academic and Student Affairs, Ulster University
Professor G Fitzgerald, School of Business and Economics, Loughborough University
Professor W Golden, JE Cairnes School of Business and Economics, National University of Ireland, Galway

REVALIDATION UNIT

CO-ORDINATOR: Ms T Cullen, Ulster University Business School

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr B McArthur, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 5J.

MSc Innovation Management in the Public Service (with a PgDip Innovation Management in the Public Service exit award) (PT)
(Proposed new title: Public Service Leadership and Innovation)

The MSc Innovation Management in the Public Service is offered jointly by the Department of Global Business and Enterprise on Ulster's Magee campus and by the School of Business at Letterkenny Institute of Technology (LYIT). The programme is offered in part-time mode and is targeted at those employed in senior positions in the public sector in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI). The qualification is a joint award conferred by Ulster and LYIT. The programme was originally validated in September 2003 with a start date of January 2004. It was revalidated in 2007 and again in 2012.

The programme comprises six compulsory 20-credit point modules and a final 60-credit point *Research Project* module. The duration of the programme is two calendar years (six semesters) with a January start date. A Postgraduate Diploma exit award is available. Each of the 20-credit point modules is delivered using a two-day block teaching session and a one-day Action Learning Set meeting.

The Course Team propose a change of programme title to, 'Public Service Leadership and Innovation' (see sections 3.3 and 6 below and recommendation 1).

The Panel met initially with a joint Ulster/LYIT Senior Management Team comprising, from Ulster, the Executive Dean of the Ulster University Business School, Professor Durkin, the Associate Dean (Education), Professor Farley, the Head of Department of Global Business and Enterprise, Dr Loane and the Associate Head of Department, Dr Boyd, and from Letterkenny Institute, the Registrar, Mr Bennett, the Head of the Department of Business Studies, Ms Doherty and the Head

of the School of Business, Mr Margey, together with the joint Course Directors, Ms Cullen (UU) and Ms O'Rourke (LYIT). The Panel then met with a student group comprising current students and recent graduates of the programme and finally, with the course team to discuss the programme in detail.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Agenda and programme of the meeting
- Guidelines for revalidation panels
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Master's Degree in Business and Management (2015)
- QAA Master's Degree Characteristics Statement (2015)
- External examiners' reports for the last two years
- Programme document

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 *Introduction*

The Panel asked the Team to outline the programme's history and development. The Team replied that the programme had been developed in 2003 and had started in January 2004. It was seen at the time as an opportunity to contribute to the development and reform of the public sector and as an opportunity for cross-border collaboration and the development of a synergy between the two participating institutions. The 'buy-in' at the time by the two governments had been crucial. The use of teaching blocks and action learning sets in programme delivery had proved successful and an attractive model for both busy civil servants and their organisations. The Team suggested that the programme provided a vehicle for personal, professional and organisational development and over the years, had contributed substantially to graduates' career progression and organisational transformation throughout Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI).

The Team explained that the programme had originally been funded in each jurisdiction by central government. During the recent recession, securing adequate funding had proved challenging. However, the governments had recognised the programme as key in terms of its positioning within higher education and its importance to transformation and change in the public sector. The Team said that currently, their own departments fund students. The cost was approximately £9000 although this could fluctuate between the jurisdictions depending on the currency rate. The Team explained that the institutions tried to balance student intake to avoid a significant majority in one jurisdiction. In response to the Panel, the Team stated that under the agreed financial model, each institution retained two-thirds of students' fees.

3.1 *Demand*

The Panel noted falling student numbers in the last two years suggesting the programme was losing money. The Panel asked why, in these circumstances, there was continued support for the programme. The LYIT Team replied that the programme was the only one of its 14 taught Master's programmes that was a collaborative course. They explained that under the government's education policy, five higher education 'clusters' had been established across the country. LYIT sat within the North West cluster part of whose strategic plan was the development of cross-border collaboration in course provision. The current programme was regarded as so strategically important that when, during the recent recession, it had become a lose-maker, continued support was provided to ensure its future viability. They pointed out that recently the programme had reached a break-even point. They said that the relationship between LYIT and Ulster was also regarded as strategically important in terms of future cross-border research and other collaborative projects that LYIT had currently under consideration. The LYIT Team emphasised government

recognition of the programme's strategic value and the importance of establishing 'bridges' between North and South particularly given the future impact of Brexit. Apart from its support for students, the transformational value of the programme was recognised.

The Ulster Team supported the LYIT view also stressing the strategic importance of the programme. They stated that the programme was part of its wider collaborative provision with ROI institutions and suggested that the impact of Brexit would result in further conversations around greater collaboration between Ulster and ROI institutions. Regarding the revalidated programme, they said that the starting point had been the 'root and branch' review of the curriculum undertaken in preparation for revalidation that had taken account of feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. The Team expressed confidence that with targeted marketing student numbers would increase in the immediate future and over the succeeding years thus ensuring the programme's continued viability.

The Panel asked how future funding could be assured. The Team stated that during the recent difficult times, the course team, in order to reduce costs, had 'stripped out' costs of delivery where possible. On a positive note, currently, 15 prospective students had registered an interest in taking the course at LYIT. Two already had funding in place and third had almost secured funding. This was despite the fact that the programme had not yet been marketed for next year. The Team explained that a new joint branding and marketing campaign had been developed and would begin as soon as approval of the programme had been secured.

3.3 *Programme title*

The Team was asked to explain their rationale for the proposed retitling of the programme to 'Public Service Leadership and Innovation'. The Team replied that this had resulted from feedback from the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) that wanted leadership promoted in its content and title. This, they said, would position the programme within the NICS where they 'needed it to go' and could therefore be actively promoted. Recruitment within the NICS would be from grades five to seven. Regarding 'innovation', the Team said that an entrepreneurial approach would be employed as a means of affecting the transformational relationship in how business is done in the public sector. An innovative way of doing business would be woven throughout all modules. This would involve looking at problems from a different perspective and taking on more risk resulting in a new way of doing things. Assimilation of 'a badge, space and mind-set' would ensure that leadership and innovation would go hand-in-hand.

The Panel, noting the change in the programme title from 'management' to 'leadership', asked what had been changed in the curriculum to reflect this. The Team replied that the leadership theme would run throughout the programme and particularly so in the first module, *Context of Leadership, Innovation and Transformation*. In addition, contact hours would be increased significantly with additional 1-day online contact in each module. The Team stated that culture and change were inextricably linked and that this would be reflected across all modules in terms of innovation and leadership. They said that the emphasis on leadership resulted from discussions with future public sector leaders who wanted leadership to be an important component of the new programme while retaining innovation and hence the reason both were reflected in the proposed new title. The Team stated that the first iteration of the programme had focused on e-government, more on technical systems change. Over time, the focus had changed because of stakeholder feedback to people management and now, again based on stakeholder feedback, the focus was changing to leadership linked to innovation.

3.4 *Engagement with industry*

The Panel asked to what extent had there been engagement with industry to ensure that the programme remained industry relevant. The Team replied that industry engagement had been extensive. Seminars with public sector leaders including past graduates of the programme had taken place over the past summer. Consultation at different levels of the public service had also

taken place to identify their requirements. The message was clear that the sector wanted the emphasis moved from 'management' to 'leadership'.

In terms of the move away from an IT based programme, external panel member, Professor Fitzgerald, suggested that within the public sector in the UK, the use of IT systems was not always properly understood or used as effectively as they might. It was further suggested that historically, IT projects had often gone 'disastrously wrong'. The Panel questioned therefore the removal of the focus away from IT. The Team suggested that the situation in Britain was not reflected in NI and the reasons for this were discussed. The Team further suggested that within the programme, during action learning, students would learn from each's experience, for example, where IT systems failed, and about managing the IT consultant. They suggested that students would learn from the insights of the group, which was not a nebulous concept, and which would provide added value for them. It was also pointed out that students often pick change management projects for their dissertations. A review of past dissertations indicates that IT-based projects do not dominate; rather, students tended to identify burning issues within their own departments. The Team emphasised that use of IT was not being removed from the programme; rather the focus was being changed where students would learn how to use it differently and more effectively.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a group of six students, three from each jurisdiction of whom four were recent graduates of the programme and two are current students. The following are summaries of their responses to issues raised by the Panel.

The Panel asked whether the programme had met or was meeting the students' expectations. One graduate stated that participation in the programme had developed his leadership skills and made him more confident in challenging people. He had also gained a deeper understanding of the management of change within an organisation. He said that he had previously completed a Master's research programme that had been technical in content while this programme was less so, focusing more on business management. He added that he had particularly enjoyed the action learning sets and their concentration on the application of theory to practice. The action learning sets, he said, had helped with writing his dissertation.

Another graduate stated that an important learning component for him had been the completion of the 2000-word assignments that had taught him how to set down his thoughts on paper in a clear and concise way, an important skill in the workplace. The Panel asked him about the change in focus away from IT towards innovation and leadership. He responded that in regard to 'innovation, in his view, this was about re-thinking how business was done rather than about the use of new technology. He suggested that organisational change was driven by people and the reorganisation of resources and not by IT.

The Panel asked the group for one reason they would give in recommending the programme. One replied that cohort diversity would be her reason. This provided opportunities to learn from others, an important added value of the programme. This, she said, reflected the diversity that existed in most organisations. She also said that she had enjoyed the research associated with the assignments and the achievement of a better understanding of the complexities of government. A graduate stated that the programme was jargon-free and provided a skills toolset that instilled confidence in leading change. He said that the leadership component had been very strong and this had proved particularly useful in his workplace.

The Panel asked about the group's view of the guest speakers. A graduate stated that the external speakers had provided a different perspective. He viewed it as an important part of the programme since all the speakers were highly qualified and were speaking from 'real world' experience. He said that it was clear from the speakers that all organisations faced similar problems.

The Panel asked the graduates whether completion of the programme had aided career progression. All indicated that it had. One graduate stated that the programme had given him the

confidence to deal with more senior colleagues and a means of communicating with them using appropriate business language.

A current student stated that she had come to the public sector after ten years in the private sector. The programme had helped her quickly gain an understanding of the public sector. She particularly welcomed the leadership and management components and that assignment dates had been provided two years in advance and had not been changed which, she said, was very helpful in managing her study time around work commitments. She expressed the wish that ALS meetings were similarly scheduled well in advance.

The Panel asked whether the current programme contained any discourse around the difference between 'leadership' and 'public sector leadership'. The student with the private sector background stated that because of that experience, she could see an overlap between the two sectors and that the programme filled gaps that she had not realised were there. One graduate stated that the curriculum had focused on the public sector. Another stated that leadership had been taught in a way that made it relevant to your own workplace. A current student said that the leadership teaching had enabled her to 'look up' and gain a better understanding of government strategy and where it was headed which made it easier to understand where her own department fitted within that overall strategy. This had come through contributions by guest speakers and through assignments linked to her own department. This, she said, was how the programme was made 'real' for her. One graduate stated the leadership skills learned were transferable; he had used them in the voluntary sector. He stated that they helped students to develop their own leadership style. Another graduate stated that the skills learned had given him the confidence to 'shape' things' within his organisation as opposed to just 'managing things'.

The Panel asked what the group would recommend to improve the programme. Two of the group stated that earlier advertising of the programme should take place, in August if possible. One said that he had only heard about the programme in November by which time departments had already finalised their budgets. A current student complained about the long list of acronyms that students were exposed to at the outset of the programme. She also suggested that there was too much overlap between modules. She however praised the contribution of guest lecturers that in some cases were exceptional. A graduate suggested that provision of a pre-reading pack before the start date would be extremely helpful. Another suggested that the first module, *Context of Leadership, Innovation and Transformation*, was an introductory module and could contain more on change management. It was suggested by one of the group that for him, the ALS "did not deliver". Another agreed that the ALS days "were a struggle" and students were late getting confirmed dates. He suggested that dates should be set down at the outset of the programme. He also suggested that the programme for the ALS day was poorly organised. One graduate suggested that more was learned during informal meetings through sharing experiences than through the formal part of the day. The group agreed with a Panel suggestion that students should be able to organise the day themselves.

The Panel noted that the required reading lists for modules appeared over-long with some listing as many as five core texts. The group indicated that in practice, there was only one core text for each module. All other listed texts were for reference purposes only. The Panel was informed that staff provided students with a reading pack for each module. The group were highly complimentary about this which, they said, saved students a great deal of time having to source the material themselves.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 *Programme content and coherence*

Module overlap

The Panel stated that during the student meeting, it had been suggested that there was excessive overlap between modules and asked the Team to describe the coherence of the new programme.

The Team acknowledged that there was overlap but stated that steps had been taken to minimise this. For example, two modules in the current programme dealing with culture and change had now been combined into a single module, *Change and Cultural Management*. The Team explained that where overlap remained, this was deliberate. They explained that two basic management themes ran throughout the programme, leadership and innovation, which were taught in the context of change and culture. They suggested that one could not be addressed without reference to the others. Since leadership and innovation were addressed throughout, some overlap between modules was both necessary and desirable to provide reinforcement and consideration of the themes from different perspectives.

Coherence

The Team went on to explain the coherence and underlying philosophy of the programme in the following terms. The aim was to encourage participants to look outside their immediate organisations at wider regional, national, European and global reform initiatives and to examine the transformational leadership required to take maximum advantage of initiatives such as geopolitical changes including 'Brexit' (modules 1 and 2, *Context of Leadership, Innovation and Transformation* and *Transformational Leadership*). The need to concentrate processes and outcomes from a citizen-centred perspective and to lead change and develop organisational culture would then be addressed in modules, 3 and 4, *Citizen Centric Policy Design* and *Change and Cultural Management*. The programme would then critically examine the central area of implementation through the emerging area of shared services covered in module 5, *Digital Transformation and Shared Service*. The final taught module, *Performance Management*, would closely evaluate benefits mapping and realisation of process applications within the context of delivery and outcome based accountability of the impact and achievement of desired policy objectives.

Leadership and innovation

The Panel suggested that leadership in the public sector was quite distinct from that in the private sector and asked where in the curriculum, public sector leadership would be specifically addressed. The Team replied that external contributors in the first introductory module, *Context of Leadership, Innovation and Transformation*, would address this. It would also be addressed in the *Performance Management* module. The Team referred to a number of guest speakers across other modules who would also address this issue. In response to the Panel, the Team stated that individual leadership styles would also be covered. Students would complete a questionnaire based on the BELBIN team roles that would provide an indication of each's personal leadership style. The results would then be discussed. They suggested that it might be useful to have students complete the questionnaire at the beginning of the programme and then again at the end.

The Panel asked whether the programme was clear around the focus of innovation, that it was related to leadership rather than the use of IT. The Team replied that innovation would be focused in areas such as government policies, information sharing, collaboration and change management; it was not about innovative IT systems. They explained that innovation would be a central theme running throughout the programme and would be addressed across all the modules and by guest speakers.

Currency

The Panel asked how the Team assured itself that the programme remained current and relevant to industry. They replied that this was achieved through feedback from a number of sources including partner organisations, guest speakers (who were all at the cutting edge of industry and academia), professional networks across Europe and the USA and student dissertations that always addressed a current topic within their own organisations. Students' interaction during teaching blocks and action learning sets also helped in this regard. The Team added that they always endeavoured to align the programme with the current public sector agenda.

5.2 Learning and teaching methods

The Panel asked how the 2-day teaching blocks would be managed. The Team stated that they would be managed by the module co-ordinator. An important part of the programme would be contributions by guest speakers who would be asked to address areas consistent with the learning outcomes for the module. Case studies, workshops, research skills and assignment preparation would make up the remainder of the time. The Team suggested that the overnight stay would be equally important as it would facilitate informal discussions between participants that students regard as valuable learning opportunities. The Team emphasised that the teaching blocks would be carefully scripted to ensure that the module learning outcomes were being addressed. They added that their experience of managing the teaching blocks over the years had enabled them to structure and manage the programme in such a way as to ensure that students would derive maximum benefit some which would not be documented, for example, the sharing of experiences during informal discussions,

The Panel asked the Team to outline the operation of the action learning sets. The Team stated that normally each group would comprise six or eight members from both jurisdictions. The 1-day meeting would take place approximately midway through the module. Each group member would identify a problem or issue within his or her own organisation in advance to present to other group members during the meeting. The Team explained that the ALS would be self-facilitated by students and by the time of the fourth module, they would be fully conversant with how it worked and how best to manage the day to achieve the greatest benefit. The Team pointed out that students would gain additional valuable learning through the sharing of experiences during informal fringe meetings. They also said that such was the benefit derived from the ALS, very often students retained a network of ALS members after graduation. The Panel informed the Team that students had stated that it would be helpful if ALS meeting dates were scheduled at the outset. In response, the Team stated that they had addressed student feedback regarding the ALS during the past summer and had taken on their concerns in a number of areas. They said that it was their intention to address these concerns and generally provide more support in order to ensure that students would achieve the greatest benefit from the ALS.

5.3 Marketing

The Panel stated that during the student meeting it had been suggested that marketing of the programme was left too late in the year by which time organisations' budgets for the year had already been allocated. The Team replied that in recent years it had been challenging for the NICS' Centre for Applied Learning (which provides training to NICS staff) as they had had little discretionary spending. Consequently, departments had been reluctant to promote the programme. This had resulted in a lower intake in the last two years. As a result, as part of their new branding and marketing strategy, the course team had gone out and held discussions with partner organisations to encourage greater participation. This process was continuing. The Team said that given the feedback received to date, they were confident that demand for the programme would increase in the near to medium future.

5.4 Reading lists

The Panel queried the extensive reading lists associated with each module. The Team replied that there would only be one or two core texts for each module, the remainder being for supplementary reading only. The Team pointed out that students would be provided with a reading pack for each module. Supplementary material such as journal articles were updated each year and students were encouraged to feedback relevant material identified by them.

5.5 Curriculum Design Principles

In response to the Panel, the Team confirmed that Ulster's new curriculum design principles had been taken into account in the review of the programme. Modules had been re-sized to 20-credit point modules, the number of module learning outcomes had been reduced and assessments had

been retained at one assessment per module. Regarding assessment and feedback, Turnitin would be used and feedback to students would be provided online.

5.6 *Study Skills*

The Team confirmed that study skills would be addressed early in the programme. For example, during the first module, students would receive instruction on academic writing, referencing and such like. Students would also be asked to submit drafts of their assignments for formative assessment to aid improvement in the final submission. Moreover, throughout the programme, in each module, students would receive both formative and summative assessment, all aimed at subsequent improvement. Students would also be pointed to study skills support on the VLE and would be encouraged to use Turnitin.

5.7 *Demand*

The Panel noted the falling student intake numbers in the last two years. The Team explained that this would be the first year that they had embarked on a major 'joint branding and promotion' campaign. They acknowledged that in the past they had perhaps undersold the programme. They stated that they believe that there was 'a great story' to tell regarding the programme and the new marketing campaign was designed to 'get the message out' to as wide an audience as possible. The Team stated that they were confident that student numbers would increase in the immediate future and that the future viability of the programme was secure.

The Panel asked whether the Team benchmarked the programme against any other renowned MBA programmes such as those at Warwick or Manchester. The Team stated that, given the nature of their programme, its delivery model, and particularly, its cross-border aspect, the programme was unique and therefore not easily benchmarked against any other programme. They suggested that the course was "ahead of its time", for example, ten years ago executive learners had not wanted the digital change agenda woven into their programme. The programme, they suggested had four success factors; content, delivery mode, assessment strategy and impact on students through career progression and their personal and professional development.

5.8 *Letterkenny Institute of Technology*

The Panel suggested that the revalidation document did not fully reflect the contribution of LYIT to the institutions' partnership. The Team emphasised that the partnership was equal. They said that at the outset, it had been agreed between the institutions that programme documentation would be produced and reviewed under the auspices of Ulster and its processes and therefore the Ulster document template had been used. Consequently, a false impression of imbalance in the partnership might be given. The Team stated that in preparing for revalidation, there had been many lengthy meetings involving staff from both institutions. Every decision, for example the move from 15-credit point to 20-credit point modules, was discussed fully and agreed. Stakeholder feedback had been received from both jurisdictions. Board of Examiners meetings were held alternatively at each institution. The Panel suggested that more information could be included on the programme document relating to LYIT resources. The Team agreed and stated that during recent meetings they had agreed on a number of areas where additional information relating to LYIT would be added in the revised document.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Team on the following:

- the cross-border initiative and high level of collaboration between the two institutions
- the high level of student satisfaction
- the formally structured manner in which guest speakers contribute and the calibre of guest speakers

- the employment of the Action Learning Sets as a delivery method

The course team having accepted the Panel's suggested programme title, 'Leadership and Innovation in the Public Sector', the Panel approved the proposed title and agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Subject Unit 5J: Innovation Management in the Public Service (now Leadership and Innovation in the Public Sector) be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2017/18 – 21/22 inclusive taking account of the January 2017 start date) subject to the condition and recommendations of the Panel being addressed and a satisfactory response and a revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 12 January 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- 1) that all issues identified in the appendix to the panel report be addressed;

Recommendations

- 1) that consideration be given to a review of the proposed new programme title in line with discussions with the Panel (which suggested, 'Leadership and Innovation in the Public Sector');
- 2) that a review of the module *required* reading lists be undertaken;
- 3) that a narrative be included in the revised course document to better reflect the equity of Letterkenny Institute in the development and delivery of the programme;
- 4) that greater focus be applied to the branding and marketing of the programme;
- 5) that evidence of engagement with industry (ensuring currency and relevance of the curriculum) be made explicit in the revised document.

7 APPRECIATION

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