

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EVALUATION/REVALIDATION PANEL: UNIT 28Giii SPORT (PG)

22 March 2018

PANEL: Dr T Maguire, Head of School of Arts and Humanities, Ulster University (Chair)
Mr M McQueen, Belfast School of Architecture and the Built Environment, Ulster University
Ms E Bonner, Sports President, Students' Union, Ulster University
Dr S Lack, Lecturer and Specialist MSK Physiotherapist, Centre for Sports and Exercise Medicine, Queen Mary University of London
Dr S Patterson, Senior Lecturer in Exercise Physiology, School of Sport, Health and Applied Science, St Mary's University, Twickenham

REVALIDATION UNIT

CO-ORDINATOR: Professor D Brennan, School of Sport, Ulster University

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

1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the following provision within Revalidation Unit 28Giii Sport (PG).

Provision

PgDip/MSc Sport and Exercise Medicine (FT/PT) (JN)

MSc Strength and Conditioning (FT/PT) (JN)
(NOTE: New proposal for evaluation)

The PgDip/MSc Sport and Exercise Medicine was presented for revalidation. It comprises five compulsory modules, four 30-credit point taught modules and a 60-credit point research project module. It would be offered in full- and part-time modes. The full-time programme would be delivered across three semesters over a calendar year and across six semesters over 3 years in part-time mode. The projected student intake figures for the programme are 14 full-time and 5 part-time students in Year 1 rising to 22 full-time and 6 part-time in Year 5. The minimum intake to ensure viability would be six students.

The MSc Strength and Conditioning was presented for evaluation. It comprises seven compulsory modules, the taught modules comprising a mix of six 15- and 30-credit point modules and a 60-credit point research project module. Two of the modules are shared with the Sport and Exercise Medicine programme, the 30-credit point *Optimising Exercise and Load* and the 60-credit point *Research Project*. The programme would also be offered in full- and part-time modes over the same periods as indicated for the Sport and Exercise Medicine programme. It has Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate exit awards.

Prior to the meeting, the Panel were taken on a tour of the facilities available to support delivery of the new Strength and Conditioning programme by Dr Breslin, the Head of the School of Sport and Professor Brennan, the Revalidation Unit Coordinator. No concerns were raised regarding the facilities. The Panel met initially with the Senior Management Team comprising the Associate Dean (Education), Professor McKillop, Dr G Breslin, Professor D Brennan, and the Course Director for the PgD/MSc Sport and Exercise Medicine, Dr R Kennedy. The Panel then met with a student

group from the current Sport and Exercise Medicine programme and finally, with the subject team to discuss the provision 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 Characteristics (2015)
- External examiners' reports for the last two years (Sport and Exercise Medicine)
- Preliminary comments from panel members
- Revalidation documentation

The following report is a summary of responses to Panel questions provided by each of the groups that the Panel met with during the day.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Context and development of programme

At the outset of the meeting, Dr Breslin gave a presentation about the School, its makeup, history and programmes, the approach taken by the subject team to the revalidation/evaluation process, the changes made to the Sport and Exercise Medicine programme and touched on the relocation of the School to the Belfast campus.

Regarding the new proposal, MSc Strength and Conditioning, competition from other institutions was not considered a major factor since, generally, local students tended to stay close to home and there were no direct competitors within easy travelling distance. The approach to learning and teaching would be slightly different with an emphasis on practical delivery with a view to producing competent practitioners. Demand for this type of approach had been there for some time within the industry ensuring future sustainability of the programme. Currently there was only one fully online module but there may be future opportunities for development in this direction. While a fully online programme might attract more international students, given the practical nature of delivery, an on-campus element would always be required.

The development of the programme had been informed by local sports organisations such as Ulster Rugby, the Northern Cricket Union, Ulster GAA, Ulster Athletics, Sport NI and the Sport Ireland Institute. Feedback from former sports students had also been sought. Each sporting body had been visited providing an opportunity to negotiate with the bodies over competences and skills to be included. During this process, the expectations of the industry bodies had had to be managed given the limits of a Master's programme. The sports industry had been supportive of the programme's development since it met a gap in the industry. The industry view was that too often graduates did not have the necessary practice experience. Governing bodies and those on the School's employer forum had committed to offering internships to help plug the experience gap. While practice experience could be included as an admission requirement, this would significantly narrow the market for the programme.

Regarding Sport and Exercise Medicine, strong links existed with local sports organisations including those described above. Demand had remained healthy over recent years. An open night was arranged for the following evening and to date, seventeen students had registered interest. This was five up from the same point last year. The challenge however was to turn an expression of interest into a registered student.

3.2 Physical Resources

Regarding relocation to Belfast, based on early consultations, the expectation was that the School would be provided with the same level of facilities currently available on the Jordanstown campus. The School was therefore proceeding on that basis. Delays in completion of the new campus were however inhibiting clarity around facilities. A transition team would be established to manage the relocation. Ulster Rugby had indicated an interest in hosting the programme at some point in the future.

3.3 Gender imbalance

A student gender imbalance existed in sports provision particularly at undergraduate level. An action plan had been developed to encourage more female applicants. Local schools had been visited and there had been a promotion within the School led by the Faculty Executive Board whereby students were to engage in discussions around Athena Swan. It was acknowledged that the industry workforce was male dominant which can be intimidating for women. Within the 'strength and conditioning' area however, this was changing. The environment was now more conducive to females. While gender imbalance within the industry was an ongoing issue, the view was that the situation was improving.

3 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with three full-time students from the current Sport and Exercise Medicine programme. The following are summaries of their responses to issues raised by the Panel.

Induction

- Lasts 2 days
- Informal and informative
- One area of improvement would be to provide students with the dates of block teaching days for the whole year.

Block teaching

- Day normally runs from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm
- Very intensive
- Difficult to concentrate after 4.00 pm
- Preferred alternative delivery mode where teaching days would be spread across the semester
- The approach suited part-time students better but acknowledged that it enabled full-time students the time to get "hands on" experience outside of the programme – opportunity to apply skills learned in classroom

Support

- No individual tutor support
- Course director set up a WhatsApp support group – questions can be raised through the app
- Support materials also posted online in BlackBoard Learn
- Tutors also available via email

Reading lists

- Reading prioritised depending on what was being covered in class

Facilities

- Library induction and access same as that for undergraduate study
- Outside class, laboratory access only available on request
- Laboratory access arranged through course director who identifies appropriate person to contact for access

- Not made aware of technicians' contact details – access only arranged through course director
- Beneficial if students were able to book laboratories directly through technicians

Practical experience

- Students progressing directly from undergraduate study have little practical experience
- More practical experience beforehand would be beneficial
- 2-hour practice sessions during the programme would also be helpful
- Course director has suggested practice sessions during free time – currently no time available within curriculum

Postgraduate study

- Delivery method with a practice emphasis provides a 'Master's' feeling
- It is not just about how something is done but also about why it's being done this way
- Learn theory in class then apply in practice and see if it works
- Better understanding of what you are being taught
- More focus on treatment for an individual as opposed to the provision of more general information
- More challenging intellectually – more thinking and reasoning required
- More clinical reasoning, question why you are doing something
- Assignments need to be more than simply descriptive
- Final 60-credit point research project provides opportunity for the application of learning

Ethics

- Ethics highlighted throughout the programme
- Relates to relationship between a player, manager and coach
- Provides confidence for decision-making in the workplace
- Confidence in saying "no" to managers and outlining the consequences of advice being ignored
- More aware of the importance of documenting advice provided

4 MEETING WITH SUBJECT TEAM

Both Programmes

4.1 Master's v Postgraduate Diploma

The difference between the Postgraduate Diploma and Master's stages of the programmes was the final 60-credit point research project in the Master's stage. There were two or three programme level learning outcomes that would only be achieved through successful completion of the Master's stage.

4.2 Online Assessment

There were advantages and disadvantages to employing online assessments. Ways of discouraging cheating included use of short quizzes whereby students were required to answer a set number of questions in a set time. Once the quiz began, it would only be open for the set duration of the quiz. The quizzes would normally involve short multiple-choice questions (MCQs). The tutor would be alerted once the quiz was completed and was able to provide almost immediate feedback. It was acknowledged that there was no way of ensuring that the person completing the work was the student submitting the work. Knowledge of a student's normal performance level helped as did the way in which a question was constructed requiring a student to draw on his or her own personal experience. It was also suggested that there had to be "a sense of honesty" involved. It was suggested to the Team that another approach might be to open the quiz only on a set date and time for a set duration. MCQs were considered a viable means of testing at Master's

level since students would be required to successfully complete a series of tasks in order to be able to answer the questions. Questions would be based on the knowledge and understanding acquired by students at that point and background study in which they had engaged. This approach would be taken across all modules where MCQs were used as a means of assessment although other means of assessment would also be used.

4.3 Access to laboratories / Induction

Contrary to the students' view, laboratory access outside of normal class time could be arranged directly through the laboratory technicians. Technicians, of which there were three supporting the current provision, had specialist skills crucial to delivery of the programme. One grade 5 technician post had been filled the previous week. Replacements were recruited on a "like for like" basis. The panel suggested that the means of access to laboratories be highlighted to students during initial induction.

4.4 Induction

Regarding induction, in all programmes within the School, the course director takes the lead. Initial induction takes place over two days. It includes, inter alia, a presentation from the Students Union, introduction to student support services and library facilities and volunteer opportunities. The second day includes a briefing and review of coursework assessment during which students are provided with exemplars of previous good work and receive feedback from former students who give them the benefit of their experience of assessment. Different approaches to induction had been tried over the years to aid students' transition with the building of cohort relationships an underpinning factor across all the activities.

4.5 Reading Lists

The panel, having noted the extensive reading lists in some of the modules, advised that it needed to be made clear to students which of the reading material was supporting the teaching in a particular module. Normally, the best approach was to identify a core text supported by some additional reading. Consideration should be given to limiting the amount of reading and to providing guidance as to what should be read as progress was made through a module.

4.6 Block Teaching

Wednesday afternoon was traditionally set aside for sporting activities within the University. Block teaching days often included Wednesday afternoons. Between block teaching and internships, students had suggested that they often had no opportunity to take part in sport. A discussion took place around whether more Wednesday afternoons might be freed up during which it was pointed out that now, only two Wednesday afternoons per semester were used for sporting activities and that most University teams now trained in the evenings. This would afford students the opportunities to get involved with University sports.

4.7 Module - Optimising Exercise and Load: Effective Monitoring and Management

Optimising Exercise and Load would be shared across both programmes. It was suggested that the module assessment was clinical based while the content was practice based and that this would benefit students on the Sport and Exercise Medicine programme. Following a discussion, it was agreed that two options could be introduced which would ensure equity of opportunity across the two programmes.

Sport & Exercise Medicine

4.8 Recent changes

One substantial and two minor changes have been made to the programme. The substantial change is the removal of two 15-credit point modules, *Physical Activity and Disease Prevention* and *Applied Biomechanics* and the development of a new 30-credit replacement module *Optimising Exercise and Load: Effective Monitoring and Management*. This had resulted following feedback from the current and previous student cohorts and the former course director who felt that a bespoke module was needed covering latest evidence on optimal athlete loading (monitoring and management) strategies. The aim of the module was to better prepare and equip students to understand, monitor, analyse and manage the implications of loading parameters.

The two minor changes to existing modules involve the addition of nutritional considerations and expansion of mental health and well-being of the athlete in *Sports Rehabilitation* and the addition of pain science considerations in the management of an athlete's injury in *Sports Injury Management*. These changes were made in response to the emergence of a greater understanding of the psychology of athletes, their nutritional demands, and especially a greater understanding of the complexity of pain.

4.9 Delivery Model

Block teaching days was the delivery model employed. Students attended on campus for 3-day teaching blocks on two or three occasions during the semester. Students received a great deal of information during a relatively short period. They then went away and were able to work on their assessments and had time to develop their practical skills. While the teaching blocks involved long days, there were sufficient breaks and delivery of material was not rushed. It was suggested that the availability of recorded lectures online would help students. This was an approach that the teaching team was keen to develop, particularly for those lectures coming later in the programme.

4.10 Content – balance between theory and practice

Experience had indicated that the absence of practice skills within the programme had provided difficulties for those students without previous experience. Consequently, more practice elements had now been included. More practice would be incorporated by immediately following lectures with practice workshops in the laboratory. In addition, internships would be organised with partner organisations such as Ulster Rugby and the University Students' Union sports teams. The external panel members outlined the processes employed in their own institutions to develop practice skills which included half-day clinical placements and two weeks block practice sessions, none of which was formally assessed.

Since the programme had originally been designed by two physiotherapists, the focus was more 'physio-centric'. The panel suggested that if the aim was also to recruit medics, the team needed to ensure that the content would also meet their needs. The team indicated that they would look at the content again.

4.11 Programme Level Learning Outcomes

A discussion took place around the approach taken to the mapping of module learning outcomes to the programme level learning outcomes. It was suggested, given that each module had only four identified learning outcomes, that too many module outcomes had been being mapped to the programme outcomes. The Team agreed to review the mapping exercise in line with the discussion.

Strength and Conditioning

4.12 Entry Requirements

Although a grade C in GCSE Mathematics was not specified in the entry requirements, most applicants would have studied mathematics at undergraduate level. The mathematics component in the programme was not complex and involved only concepts and ideas involving management of low-level data. The teaching team were confident that Master's level students would be able to cope with the level of mathematics required.

4.13 Professional Bodies

The UK Strength and Conditioning Association (UKSCA) was established in 2004 to set professional standards for strength and conditioning coaches. The UKSCA's 'Accredited Strength & Conditioning Coach' (ASCC) standard was now a requirement for jobs in the UK and overseas. While the programme works towards their requirements, its assessment strategies were different. Graduation would not guarantee a pass in the UKSCA examination but graduates would be well prepared should they wish to seek UKSCA accreditation.

The National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) is a professional organisation dedicated to advancing the strength and conditioning profession around the world. It is a large organisation with more than 45,000 members worldwide. Currently accreditation for the programme was being sought from NSCA. Individual accreditation, which will be promoted within the programme, can be achieved by passing NASA's certification (MCQs) examination. It would be expected that graduates of the programme would have acquired the requisite knowledge, skills and experience to pass the examination.

RFU certification was not considered "the most rigorous" certification nor was it considered on a par with Master's level study. It was also specific to rugby and would not therefore be promoted within the programme.

4.14 Practical experience

It was acknowledged that students entering the programme straight from undergraduate study would face challenges with the practice element of the programme. However, this was not considered insurmountable. During the block teaching days, there would be an even divide between teaching and practice sessions. Practical experience would also be supplemented through internships with local sporting bodies. Applicants with previous experience would be able to use that experience through the University's APEL policy to gain entry to the programme.

4.15 Structure

As currently presented, *Applied Statistics* is one of three modules that form the postgraduate certificate exit award. However, in both full-time and part-time programmes, *Applied Statistics* is not delivered until the latter stages of the programme by which time students would have completed 120 credits of study (and be eligible for the award of a postgraduate diploma). The team indicated that *Applied Statistics* had been purposely placed at that point in the structure "to lead into the [research] project". However, given the impact of its positioning on the postgraduate certificate, the programme structure would be reviewed.

It was suggested that, given their content, the sequencing in delivery of *Principles and Practice of Strength and Conditioning* and *Nutrition and Exercise Metabolism*, be changed to ensure that the latter module is delivered first.

4.16 Module -Applied Statistics

A discussion took place round the use of the (free) Hopkins spreadsheet software in *Applied Statistics* and its appropriateness. While the Hopkins spreadsheet would be used, it would be “broken down” and not everything included. It was pointed out that Excel and SPSS would also be used.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the Course Team on the following:

- clear evidence of thought and hard work having gone into production of the revalidation/evaluation document
- development of provision which meets demand from industry and students
- alignment with Ulster’s Five & Fifty goals through a strong bond between research and teaching that articulates academic excellence.
- programme content which is academically comprehensive, relevant and topical, providing a strong platform for students to develop skills within their respective fields.
- range of statistics models used in the *Applied Statistics* module
- students’ praise for the high level of commitment of the teaching team on the Sports and Exercise Medicine programme
- range and quality of facilities on the Jordanstown campus and access to a range of facilities within external partner organisations

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision within Revalidation Unit: 28Giii Sport (PG) be approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018/19 – 2022/23 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 **31 May 2018** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- 1) that all issues identified in the appendix to the panel report be addressed;
- 2) that confirmation be provided by the Associate Dean (Education) that all outstanding library materials will be purchased and in place prior to commencement of the provision.

Recommendations

- 1) that the Faculty, in anticipation of campus relocation, ensures that as a minimum, the current level of specialist facilities available on the Jordanstown campus is replicated on the Belfast campus;
- 2) that a shared approach to induction for postgraduate students is developed across the School;
- 3) that strategies to address the current gender imbalance are developed and implemented to enhance female recruitment levels;
- 4) that opportunities are explored to align the programmes with, and seek professional accreditation from, relevant professional bodies;
- 5) that approaches are developed for the regulation of online assessments that ensure they meet the QAA Code of Practice for Assessment;

- 6) that the sequencing of modules in the provision is reviewed to ensure an equivalence of experience for full- and part-time students;
- 7) that opportunities are explored to formalise and develop students' practical skills by integrating internships, clinical practice and placements;
- 8) that the means of student access to all available facilities outside normal timetabled hours is highlighted and promoted during induction;
- 9) that the coursework assessment in module, *Optimising Exercise and Load*, is revised to provide equal opportunity to students from a range of professional backgrounds;
- 10) that the approach to the teaching of ethics is made explicit within the curricula.

6 APPRECIATION

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

Ref: BMcA/panelreport/27/4/18