

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 5E1i INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

23 October 2019

PRESENT: Professor Brian Murphy, Director of Access, Digital and Distributed Learning, Ulster University (Chair)
Dr Helen McGarvey, Lecturer, School of Nursing, Ulster University
Professor Simon Harris, Professor of International Strategy, University of Edinburgh Business School
Dr Gabriela Gliga, Lecturer in Marketing, J E Carnes School of Business and Economics, National University of Ireland, Galway
Ms Collette Cassidy, Vice-President, Ulster University Students' Union

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms D Troy, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

The panel was convened to consider the following provision.

- MSc International Business (with optional Advanced Practice pathway) (with PgDip/PgCert exit awards) (FT/PT) (ME/DL/ITT)
- MSc International Business (with optional Advanced Practice pathway) (with GradCert/PgDip/PgCert exit awards) (PT) (ME) (*Extended Master's*)
- Postgraduate Diploma in International Marketing (with PgCert exit award) (PT) (*Approved without evaluation in June 2019 for a September 2019 start*).
- Postgraduate Certificate in International Business (PT) (ME/Irish Times Training) (*Commenced in September 2019.*)

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statement for Master's degree characteristics in Business and Management (2015);
4. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Strategy and Vision

The Panel asked the Senior Team to set out its strategy and vision. The Senior Team advised that the Ulster University Business School's (UUBS) vision was to become the leading provider of entrepreneurial education in the UK and Ireland by 2021. They went on to provide details of the four Departments within the Faculty, which included the Department of Global Business and Enterprise within which this provision was based. Within the current Brexit uncertainty, the Department of Global Business and Enterprise was in a unique position given its proximity to Europe and the Faculty wished to capitalise on this location. The North West was one of the most economically deprived areas and these signature

courses, delivered through a variety of platforms, acted as a catalyst for growth. The Department had been successful through a competitive tender process for the PgCert International Business and this new provision would allow further outreach out to other areas. The Executive Dean took the opportunity to commend the staff teams in developing relevant and very marketable programmes.

There had been significant investment in recent times in the Magee campus and its location provided a range of opportunities. Business engagement and outreach was fundamental to all courses.

From the students' perspective, the Senior Team advised that in undertaking any of these programmes, students would have a perspective beyond the north west of Northern Ireland in order to create economic growth. The courses were about changing and broadening horizons and applying the knowledge and skills gained through the programmes. The focus of all postgraduate programmes within Faculty was on thought and action. The courses had a very practical and relevant aspect and utilised a range of guest speakers, practical and relevant live debates and projects as well as a wide network of visiting professors and lecturers, all of which informed and linked to contextual and applied assessment. The North West region was rapidly changing with an increased number of multi-national companies coming to the area and this was one of the main drivers for this provision.

The Panel enquired how entrepreneurial education was different and was advised that entrepreneurship was embedded into all curricula and it was concerned with behaviours, creativity and transforming that creativity. This should be considered within the Northern Ireland context and to change the culture and behaviours for students to view themselves as global citizens and look beyond the local region. The Department also had well developed entrepreneurship links with Babson College in Boston.

3.2 Resources

Some of the courses were delivered by non-university staff and at other off-campus locations. The Panel enquired how this was managed and was advised that the relationship with Irish Times Training had been established in excess of 20 years and a sound structure was already in place. Blended delivery was utilised and full support provided at all times.

All staff involved in delivery were approved through the University's established Recognised Teacher process. In terms of distance learning, this was facilitated by Ulster staff or University approved e-tutors could be used as required.

The Senior Team provided some examples of how group work was managed for distance learning students including the use of different technologies including Screencast. Three-day block teaching was also utilised and opportunities were available for collaboration, discussion groups and shared learning. It was confirmed that currently no live presentations were undertaken but that all presentations would be pre-recorded and uploaded, however, it could be considered in the future.

The Department of Global Business and Enterprise was the first within the Faculty to use distance learning and staff had extensive experience in all aspects of this mode of delivery.

3.3 Advanced Practice

The Panel enquired as to the rationale for the advanced practice pathway and was advised that it had been introduced initially for students as a result of discussions with QAHE with whom the Faculty had a number of franchised courses at its London and Birmingham campuses. A robust process was already in place to manage placements and similar would

be used to manage internships. This would be kept under review as numbers grew. The Advanced Practice option was very attractive in the marketplace, in particular for international students and the business community.

3.4 Minimum and maximum numbers

The Senior Team confirmed that the minimum intakes would be 10 - 12 students; and maximum (dependent on room capacity) would be 35 for the standard 'home' Master's programme.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel had discussions with two MSc International Business students, one full-time (in person) and the other part-time (via a call). During discussions the following was noted.

Induction

Both students highlighted the importance of induction and that it had been different from undergraduate in that it was more focused due to the smaller numbers. It also allowed the students to meet and bond as a group.

Course handbooks, information and support on referencing and study skills were clearly made available.

Course content

Modules were all relevant and of value. There was some natural overlap, however, this was a positive and provided linkages and a flow between modules.

There was a considerable step up from undergraduate in relation to academic writing but support was always available from very approachable and helpful staff.

Students could already see how the modules being studied could be applied to their final project and for the part-time student, to his current employment role.

Assessment and Feedback

One student had to date only experienced report writing but that a variety of assessment methods would be welcomed. It was noted, however, that this method suited students studying part-time.

The international student advised that he had done a number of class tests. In India, assessment was very examination focused so the variety of assessment in this course was a very appealing aspect.

Feedback was detailed, timely and valuable. Students were also able to get feedback on drafts prior to submission. Feedback on assessments was such that it enabled students to reflect and improve as they progressed.

Three day teaching blocks were used for full-time students, with one day the following week used for detailed feedback. This was followed by a three week break to undertake assignment work, however, staff were always available and contactable at any time. The teaching blocks allowed students to have an in-depth focus on a particular subject or topic.

Students found class time very engaging with good interaction between staff/students and peer to peer. The different group dynamic was clearly evident at postgraduate level compared to undergraduate and was a very positive aspect.

The course was intensive but in a very positive way and there were no issues in relation to assessment load. Support was always available as required and for part-time students, there could be flexibility in submission dates should work or other commitments clash. International students were required to meet weekly with the Course Director and this was also a useful meeting in many other ways.

Students recognised the benefits of group work in developing communication, leadership and problem solving skills but that it could bring additional challenges for part-time students. They confirmed that these and entrepreneurial skills were being developed through the programme not least through the use of authentic examples and assessments which really enhanced the student experience in terms of context and cultures.

Course expectations

Both students confirmed that the course had not only met but exceeded their expectations to date in terms course content and quality of teaching.

They felt so far that the course would prepare them for their first step after graduation in whatever path they chose to pursue.

In relation to entrepreneurship, they also confirmed that a new business start-up was an option in the future for both students if they right idea came along at the right time and that they would have the confidence, knowledge and skills to do so having completed the course.

Course development

Both students were content with the current course and would not change any aspects per se, however, noted some improvements for consideration:

- The part-time student would welcome additional opportunities for guest speakers within the modules.
- Another suggestion was additional opportunity to engage in real life, authentic business meetings or fieldwork activity outside of the University.

The Panel thanked the students for their engagement and open and frank discussion and wished them well in their studies and careers.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

5.1 Programmes Aims

The Panel asked the Course Team to outline explicitly the aims of the programmes and how the programme learning outcomes progressed these aims. The Course Team advised that the MSc International Business was the longest running 'parent' programme and its key aims were to give students a critical appreciation of what was required in an international context and to challenge and apply that knowledge. PgCert and PgDip exit awards were available for a student who had to exit early but to give them an award for modules studied, although these exit points were seldom utilised.

The PgDip International Marketing and PgCert International Business were developed from the MSc International Business, the former for a successful tender process with InvestNI and the latter with ITT through the Springboard+ initiative. These courses were very much informed by extensive stakeholder engagement and employer need whilst aligning to the University's Integrated Curriculum Design Framework (ICDF). Stakeholder engagement was a key part of all course development and employer engagement informed the Team as to the skills set required for employment in the area and to future proof their business. This was then fed back into course content.

The Course Team acknowledged the issue with the learning outcome maps and that this had been overlooked but would be addressed in the revised documentation.

At the end of the MSc International Business, the Team advised that students would have the knowledge and understanding of business practice in an international context and the ability to apply that knowledge. The course content and the way in which it was delivered developed students' confidence to share their knowledge in different settings. To clarify, this confidence was developed through students taking the lead on conversations and discussions rather than simply being involved. The course provided the global context, knowledge and skills for students to be able to shape the people around them.

The Team provided a number of examples of how this was achieved in a diverse student group. In relation to distance learning, much of the richness in the programme came from the students themselves and their own background and experiences.

It was challenging to show the essence of assessment in a module description but the Team provided assurance that the programmes' aims and objectives were clear to staff and students. The also noted that there was a high demand from the business community for a diverse range of business projects, many of which businesses had previously been able to present for funding opportunities. There was also a large, established network of employers to provide internship opportunities.

The Panel was assured that the required skills were being developed in the programmes but noted that it was not clear in the documentation how this was being assessed and that excellent examples presented during discussions should be captured in the assessment process. The Team informed the Panel that they had at one time assessed some of these areas but from experience had found the assessment element detrimental to free discussion.

5.2 Integrated Curriculum Design Framework (ICDF)

The Panel asked how the Team had engaged with the ICDF when reviewing the programmes in preparation for revalidation and was advised that this had been through a series of workshops involving stakeholder engagement (including employer, professional body, students and graduates) in collaboration with the University's Centre for Higher Education and Research Practice (CHERP). This was followed up with module focused workshops to review and reduce the number of learning outcomes to four and ensure that modules were not over assessed.

The Team advised that InvestNI had been the driver for the PgDip International Marketing who had been clear on the skills sets required from the programme. The Panel was of the view that stakeholder engagement and feedback was clear in the way in which this course was being assessed.

A strategic review of the MSc International Business had been undertaken the previous year so very few additional changes were required for revalidation.

When asked about the rationale for 15 credit point modules, the Team advised that this was not uncommon in the UUBS and worked well but that was permitted within the ICDF for postgraduate programmes.

5.3 Assessment

In relation to module design and assessment, the Team provided a number of examples of their approach noting that group work was not favoured at Master's level with the preference being for individual assessment integrated into the real world.

Individual report writing was the dominant means of assessment partly as a result of external examiner reports which sought a reduction in group work, however, this varied between modules. Group work and team work was still very much part of the course in order to provide students with a variety of opportunities to develop these important skills but the Team was also mindful of the eclectic student groups and not to disadvantage any particular student. The Panel recommended a clearer articulation of the skills developed and assessed within the programmes.

The Panel noted the use of one piece of assessment in some modules as high risk but was assured that this was a managed risk which would be constantly monitored. It worked well for these particular modules and its effectiveness was further evidenced by a low failure rate.

The Panel highlighted the need to include details of formative assessment within modules, much of which was already happening.

The Panel noted that no assessment rubrics were provided. The Team advised that rubrics were currently being developed and that these would be embedded into the new module handbook which would be piloted in due course. Individual assessment rubrics were used alongside the Faculty's generic assessment criteria provided in the course document.

5.4 Block Teaching

The Panel sought and received clarification on how the three day teaching blocks for full-time campus-based students operated. The Team informed the Panel that the UUBS had been using block delivery for many years and had much experience in this area. Staff were available and contactable at all times through the normal channels so students could seek support and guidance on or off campus. The Team reported no issues in students being able to immerse themselves in a module in only four days and feedback from students supported this view. It was noted that student results using block teaching and those studying 12 weeks on campus were comparable. Provision was also made for students to account for absence during the teaching blocks due to sickness, work or other commitments.

5.5 Course developments

The Panel noted that during earlier discussions, students had been very positive on all aspects of the courses but that they would welcome more real life authentic learning experiences as well more use of guest speakers. The Team stated that the mix of full- and part-time students provided exposure to 'real life' employment experiences but that they also planned to identify more guest lecturers and build up a library going forward which could be utilised in the courses as well as to inform assessment design.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The very engaged student body and the relationship between staff and students;
- i) The level of support provided to all students, part-time, full-time and distance learning;
- ii) The applied nature of the PgDip International Marketing and the level of engagement with industry evident in that programme.

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 September 2020/21 to 2024/25 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 4 December 2019** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- i) That all issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the panel report are addressed;
- ii) To clearly and concisely articulate the aims and objectives of the courses with a particular emphasis on the skills which students develop through the courses (sections 3.1 and 5.1 refer);
- iii) To include in each module description details of the range of formative assessment which is already taking place in practice (sections 3.1, 4, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 refer);

Recommendations

- i) To consider the introduction of a greater diversity of formative assessment aligned to the aims of the programmes (sections 3.1, 4 and 5.3 refer);
- ii) To reflect on the level of external stakeholder engagement in the MSc International Business programmes as is already evident in the PgDip International Marketing (sections 5.1 and 5.2 refer).

7 APPRECIATION

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

DT [25.10.19]