

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 9C2: LIBRARY INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

18 October 2017

PANEL PRESENT:	Prof A McKillop, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster (Chair) Ms H Berry, Development Officer (Learning Providers), Chartered Institute for Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Ms P Douglas, Senior Lecturer/Clinical Dietetics Facilitator, School of Biomedical Sciences, Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, Ulster Dr G Walton, Senior Lecturer, Department of Languages, Information and Communications, Manchester Metropolitan University
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs S Stewart, Academic Office, Ulster
APOLOGIES:	Ms S Hanlon, Senior Lecturer, Department of Computer and Information Sciences, Northumbria University
REVALIDATION UNIT COORDINATOR:	Dr J Bates, Lecturer in Library Information Management, School of Education, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ulster

1. INTRODUCTION

The Panel was convened to consider revalidation of the PgDip/MSc Library and Information Management (with PgCert exit award), which is a fully online part-time programme.

The programme has been professionally accredited by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) since 2009. Ms Berry attended the meeting on behalf of CILIP for professional input but re-accreditation of the programme will be undertaken separately at a later stage; the meeting was not a joint revalidation.

Earlier in 2017, the programme won two awards at the inaugural Education Awards Ireland: the Best Use of Educational Technology and Overall Excellence in Education.

Students complete four 30-credit point modules over two years to achieve the PgDip before continuing to the 60-credit point dissertation module for the MSc in year three. Students who exit the programme after year one after completing two 30-credit point modules may be awarded a PgCert exit award. All modules are compulsory.

MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

2. OVERVIEW

The programme was established in 2006 as a one-year PgCert in School Library Management within the School of Education at Ulster. It had been designed principally for school librarians and had not been professionally accredited. However, responding to growing demand for a professional qualification for librarians in the wider library sector, the School re-developed the programme as a PgDip/MSc in Library and Information Management. The PgDip/MSc began

in January 2008 as an evening class on-campus and gradually video-conferencing was introduced for delivery across all Ulster campuses with additional on-campus plenary sessions. This approach was successful in attracting students from a wider catchment area, raising professional standards in the sector and supporting research activity in the subject. The programme became a fully online course in 2016 to ensure its sustainability and to reach students outside Northern Ireland.

The Team explained how the PgDip/MSc Library and Information Management aligns with the four priorities of the Five & Fifty Strategic Plan. The programme's relevance to wider society supports Ulster's civic contribution priority, and its strong research focus and recent Education Awards evidence its academic excellence. In response to the global vision priority, the Team plans to exploit the programme's potential to recruit additional numbers of international students. In demonstrating the School's operational excellence activities, the programme offers a distinctive and high quality student experience that utilises digital student-centred infrastructure.

Research associated with the PgDip/MSc is also complementary to research within the School e.g. digital literacy skills for PGCE students.

3. MARKETING

The primary market for the programme is Northern Ireland-based students. It also attracts good enrolment numbers of students from the South of Ireland.

The programme is specialised so rather than hosting careers days and open days, the programme is promoted via CILIP professional networks, and social media in addition to more formal marketing mechanisms. The Course Director is also a regular guest speaker at external events.

Marketing is directed principally at staff working in libraries but the programme has attracted students working in information management posts, including from Allen and Overy (an international law firm with an office in Belfast), and from libraries at the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Army and within the arts sector. With plans to build on numbers of students from information management roles, marketing activity is being directed through the Special Libraries Association (a global organisation for innovative information professionals and their strategic partners in business, government, academic, and other specialised settings) and other key potential partners.

Employers who sponsor students were reassured that the move to fully online delivery would enhance the overall student experience and flexibility of the programme. However, the Team does retain at least one face-to-face event each year and encourages students to meet each other at conferences and other external events. UKeiG student or Early Career Professional Conference grants are available on an application basis for assistance to attend conferences.

4. STRUCTURE

The Panel asked why the programme is delivered as a linked PgDip/MSc with PgCert exit award rather than an MSc with PgDip and PgCert exit awards. The Team explained that the students want a professional qualification and seek the PgDip. Many students for this programme already hold a Masters or PhD in other subjects and want a PgDip so they are suitably qualified specifically for the library and information sector.

5. STAFF

The Panel noted that the programme has one full-time member of teaching staff (the Course Director). Part-time staff and tutors, and other members of staff from the School of Education and central University library also contribute to teaching on the PgDip/MSc.

Panel members heard that an Assistant Course Director will be appointed as part of staff contingency planning and to help with administration. A School Manager for the School of Education will be recruited as part of Faculty restructuring plans. In recognition of the potential for expansion, the Head of School added that a business case could be made if needed to recruit additional members of staff commensurate with growing student numbers.

The Team explained that the part-time tutors are all required to complete Ulster's FIRST STEPS Award through CHERP to develop their understanding of and practice in effective learning, teaching, and assessment. Completion of the requirements ensures part-time tutors' proficiency in online learning mechanisms and leads to the award and conferment of Associate Fellow of the HEA. Part-time tutors also complete the three-week eTutor Training short course offered through Ulster's Office for Digital Learning.

6. ADMISSIONS VIA ACCREDITATION OF PRIOR (EXPERIENTIAL) LEARNING

The Team reported that few students were admitted to the programme via the Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) route (perhaps one or two annually), and usually such applications relate to cases where a student has completed their PgDip at another institution and wanted to enrol on the MSc at Ulster. In considering such applications, the Team evaluate applicants' level of research skills.

Applicants who have relevant experience but no undergraduate degree, will be considered via an APEL route on presentation of a portfolio of their work.

The School considers all applications in line with Ulster's Guiding Principles and Policy for APL.

7. SHORT COURSES AND CPPD

The School offers short courses in library and information management, ranging from half-day and day-long workshops on specific topics e.g. research skills in libraries, information management skills for school libraries to extended short courses of several weeks. The Team explained that short courses can be useful taster programmes that serve as feeder courses for the PgDip/MSc Library and Information Management, e.g. Introduction to Information Management is a popular eight-week fully online course that attracted 20 students from library backgrounds, a number of which enrolled on the PgDip/MSc.

The Team recognised the potential for modifying short courses to fit within the University CPPD framework but explained to the Panel that there was a risk that awarding students an award in library and/or information management through the CPPD framework risked eroding the current market for the PgDip/MSc Library and Information Management.

MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met in person with a current second year student and a graduate who had progressed to a PhD. The Panel subsequently had discussions via Blackboard Learn with two additional current second year students.

8. FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

The students commended the following:

- The flexibility of the fully online mode and online accessibility of materials.
- Clear guidance and ongoing support from the Course Director and Course Team.
- Prompt resolution of any technical problems.
- Excellent feedback on assessments.

9. LEARNING AND TEACHING

Some of the students had specifically searched for online programmes when considering enrolling on a library and information management programme. Employers had sponsored several students in the group. Students enjoyed the flexibility that the online mode offered, with the only requirement for attendance at a regular set session being 1 ½ hours on Wednesday evenings. The programme delivery combined synchronous with asynchronous sessions.

The group had enjoyed the discussion boards and the breakout rooms within the teaching sessions because they helped to mimic a classroom environment.

Approximately four guest lectures had been delivered through Blackboard Collaborate in the last semester, and they had been very popular with the students.

10. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

a) Assessment

The students fed back that the assessment load had been manageable and had comprised an interesting mix of assessment types including portfolios, reports, essays, journals, group work and presentations. The students praised the basis of the assessments on “real life” scenarios and the choices offered in assessments in terms of how students could interpret portfolio tasks and the evidence they could use.

In relation to EDU718 *Leadership in Libraries for the Future*, a student said that their first submission had been very early (week 6) and that it would be beneficial to schedule the assignment for a little later to give extra time for reading and research. Portfolios had typically taken the form of six essay questions with an overall word limit of 5,000, which some students had found restrictive in terms of being able to demonstrate the depth of research that they had prepared for it.

Students had maintained reflective learning journals during the first year of the programme, which they had shared only with the Course Director. The group said that some students had found these personal journals more useful than others.

Blackboard Learn had facilitated interactive group work for collaborative presentations.

b) Feedback

The standard Ulster template had been used to highlight positive aspects of assessment submissions and points for development. It had been clear to students that assessors had read their submissions closely – feedback had been detailed and constructive, and useful for future assessments. The group added that there had been opportunities for them to further discuss feedback with tutors if they wished.

11. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

The students explained that prior to enrolment on the PgDip/MSc, communications with the Course Team and Faculty took place via email. Once they had enrolled, students had found it simple to use Blackboard Learn to access materials.

At the beginning of the programme, students had received an online induction with an introduction to study skills and referencing, and further training and refresher sessions had been available throughout the programme.

Students said they could contact the Course Director and Course Team through Blackboard Learn or by email and phone if they had any queries. Students are welcome to meet with members of the Course Team for one-to-one sessions if needed. Any technical problems or study concerns had been quickly resolved. Students confirmed that they had had access to the Student Handbook and programme regulations.

The group confirmed that central Ulster support services had been available through the student portal, and they had received regular emails on other student support and development opportunities.

12. CONTENT

The group confirmed that they had covered copyright, data protection, intellectual property and legal aspects of library and information management, and that elements had been included in their portfolios.

Students had particularly enjoyed the informatics topic because they considered it very relevant to public libraries. The theme of leadership within the context of libraries had also been popular.

13. COHORT IDENTITY

The students said that they had been able to get to know their peers and share information using Blackboard Learn. Within Blackboard Collaborate students had been encouraged to engage with the discussion boards and online breakout rooms. Students also interacted via a range of social media associated with the programme to develop a cohort identity. Students had had the chance to meet in person at conferences.

MEETING WITH THE COURSE TEAM

14. COURSE DEVELOPMENT

The Panel asked the Course Team to outline how the programme had evolved since the last revalidation five years ago in relation to addressing feedback from students and employers.

The Course Team responded by saying that results from end of module feedback student surveys shape ongoing reviews of content and delivery. (These surveys adopt the standard University templates.) Anonymous online discussion threads also provide useful feedback from students.

There is ongoing engagement with employers and a number are invited to give guest lectures. This engagement provides ample opportunity for employers to feed back to the Course Team on the sector's needs. Content is tailored annually to each cohort profile and employers' needs in relation to the students that they sponsor.

Whilst changes to the programme's content have been made incrementally in line with the sector's development since the previous revalidation, there have been more substantive

changes made to the delivery, most notably the move to the programme becoming a fully online course in 2016.

15. LEARNING AND TEACHING

a) Fully Online Mode

The move to becoming a fully online programme increases the flexibility that the programme can offer students. The programme is “portable” – students can change jobs and move geographically without interrupting their studies.

Online learning has created a different learning experience for students. Members of the Course Team have completed the University eTutor programme and have embraced a variety of new learning and teaching methods e.g. flipped classroom model and online breakout rooms during the synchronous mid-week session. The Course Team successfully secured £30,000 of funding for an immersive classroom book classification tool.

b) Synchronous Sessions

The Course Team is very supportive of the use of synchronous sessions for maintaining students’ engagement. For the first two modules synchronous sessions are used to deliver teaching during approximately 9 weeks of 12. There is gradually less use of synchronous teaching through the third and fourth modules as students become more independent learners and because it is not so necessary for the subject matter of the last taught module, *EDU958 Education Design and Initiation*.

All live sessions are recorded so students can revisit them. All notes, links and videos are posted on Blackboard Learn at least a day in advance and remain there for the duration of the programme.

c) Discussion Boards

Interaction within cohorts and communal discussions is encouraged. The Course Team designs online discussion topics to complement students’ learning and to be relevant to students’ professional work. Threads also exist for assignments and queries.

For the first thread, students are asked to introduce themselves, followed by students giving an overview of their work role. This has proved to promote a collegial spirit within student groups, and nurtures peer learning and dialogue.

d) Monitoring Student Attendance

The Course Team told Panel members that there is active and ongoing tracking of non-engaging students, including monitoring responses to discussion threads and numbers of online posts.

16. SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Induction begins in week one and is led by the Sub-Librarian for Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Students receive a tailored online induction that addresses Cloud storage, University email, online library resources, reference management and information databases. Group exercises are used to embed new skills. All the sessions are recorded so students can revisit them. The Course Team is considering moving more introductory elements of the induction to week 0 if it is possible for all students to be registered by then.

On Blackboard Learn students can access a general induction area for each module that houses links to the library, University central support services, Ulster's Skills + study skills resources and the course handbook.

All members of the Course Team are available to field student queries or concerns.

17. ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

a) Assessment Strategy

The programme is assessed entirely by coursework using a variety of assessment types. The assessment strategy has designed every module to have at least two summative assessment components, the first component devised to form the first stages of development for the later component.

b) Portfolios and Reflective Learning Journal

During the first year students submit portfolios for EDU713 *The Library and its Environment* and EDU714 *Improving Library Practice* for which students address four topics. Previously students had addressed six topics but the number has been reduced in response to student comments, to reduce the risk of over-assessment and to allow students to consider each topic in more depth.

First year students also maintain a formative reflective learning journal that is submitted as an appendix to the portfolio at the end of the year. The journal is intended to help students to apply their learning to the context of their own work place. It comprises week-by-week journal entries and a one-page summary of their reflections of their learning over the first year and how they relate to the programme learning objectives. Students receive guidance on reflective practice writing.

c) EDU958 Research Design and Initiation

EDU958 *Research Design and Initiation* is a generic module for the School. It is shared across a number of programmes so Information and Library Management students are within larger student groups from a range of subject areas for this module. However, specialist parallel workshops are held for Information and Library Management students and they are also encouraged to discuss the module online.

The module has a formative component in advance of the summative component. By week four students are expected to propose a number of research project ideas for the subsequent dissertation module. Students will consider research in others areas (including international research) and they will identify areas that they wish to pursue.

The summative assessment develops the previous formative piece of work to finalise a research proposal for the dissertation – students set out their methodology, how the dissertation will relate to their employment, data analysis, ethics, appropriate literature, etc.

d) EDU899 Dissertation

Approximately 30% of students progress from the PgDip to the MSc. Supervisors are allocated at the start of EDU899 *Dissertation*. Draft chapters are reviewed on an ongoing basis and the Course Team facilitates generic discussions within Blackboard Collaborate to guide the Master's students. The module is formally assessed by two internals and one external at the end of year three of the programme.

The Panel noted that there were 16 learning outcomes for the module and asked why there were so many. The Course Team explained that the module was generic for the School of Education but welcomed the opportunity that the revalidation presented to develop the Course Team's own dissertation module with fewer learning outcomes.

18. CONTENT

a) Digital Rights

The Panel asked how the programme addresses digital rights. The Course Team explained that themes of big data, censorship, intellectual property, copyright and data protection permeate across the programme.

The Course Team added that bibliometrics is also covered for research support.

b) Research and Scholarship-Informed Curriculum

The Course Team told the Panel that feedback from students and employers support a balance of practical skills with academic theory and in response, all teaching Course Team members are engaged in research and/or actively keep up-to-date with research developments in relation to their specific areas of expertise.

Continuing involvement with professional bodies also enables staff to keep abreast of developments in the sector. Work carried out by the Course Team can be used as case studies e.g. the Course Director carried out work to make recommendations for information management for a peace and reconciliation charity.

19. STRUCTURE

Panel members asked why taught modules were delivered as larger 30-credit point modules. The Course Team reported that this allowed the programme structure to align with Ulster's recommended part-time workload i.e. a maximum of 30-credit points per semester. The Course Team recognised that there was the possibility to break down 30-credit point modules into 15-credit point modules to give students the option to increase their study load each semester to complete the programme quicker but they said there was no demand for this.

The Course Team also noted that offering 15-credit point modules might be attractive options for Ulster's CPPD framework but the Course Team did not want to facilitate a situation where students could choose selected modules of the PgDip/MSc Library and Information Management rather than enrol on the full programme.

20. INTERNATIONALISATION

The Course Team has integrated information and resources from the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) into the PgDip/MSc e.g. resources relating to library activism for EDU718 *Leadership in Libraries for the Future*.

Guest speakers are sourced from around the world for their international perspectives. The Course Team's links and the programme's professional accreditation with CILIP also enhances its global dimension – CILIP is recognised internationally and its journal membership has a worldwide membership.

21. EMPLOYABILITY

Guest speakers are invited from a range of professions within information and library management, which helps to showcase the range of careers available the programme's graduates.

Completion of the programme enhances graduates' employability because it is a professional qualification with international accreditation.

22. READING

The Course Team said that all reading materials were available online. The Panel suggested that some of the reading lists could be updated to include "Information Strategy in Practice" and "Making Knowledge Visible: Communicating Knowledge through Information Products" by Elizabeth Orna, "Looking for Information" by Donald O. Case and the Journal of Information Literacy.

23. CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the following:

- i) Comprehensive documentation and alignment to the University's Five & Fifty Strategic Plan.
- ii) Achievement of the two awards at the 2017 Education Awards Ireland, the extensive use of contemporary and innovative e-pedagogies, and the use of a broad range of resources available on Blackboard Learn that meet the needs of online learners.
- iii) The support, enthusiasm and leadership provided by the Course Director and Course Tutors who are highly valued by students, particularly the one-to-one support offered by the Course Director.
- iv) The effective use of: the flipped classroom approach and tutor-led seminars that are delivered fully online through Blackboard Collaborate; the use of asynchronous discussion and engagement; and the regular live online classes and breakout rooms for small group teaching.
- v) Invited library guest speaker sessions and their meaningful involvement in group discussion.
- vi) The range of assessment, the applied nature of the assessment, the relevance and vocational nature of assessment.
- vii) The focus on leadership in the programme – a critical issue within the profession.
- viii) The professional engagement and networking of staff with local markets, employers and professionals.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the University's Learning and Teaching Committee that the unit be re-approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018/19 to 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 17 January 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- i) All issues identified by the Academic Office and detailed in the appendix to the Panel report are addressed.
- ii) A more focused, coherent and explicit approach to the delivery of digital rights, copyright, intellectual property and related topics is outlined in the programme document, within the module descriptions and content section.
- iii) A greater level of detail is added for assessment components for each module.
- iv) For the dissertation module, a more formalised structure to the MSc project support is outlined, to include details on formative assessment provided throughout the year to ensure continued student engagement.

Recommendations

- i) As the programme aims to focus on the theory and practice of information management and is relevant for library and other information management professionals, the modules and commentaries should reflect the needs of all professionals.
- ii) Consideration is given to short course provision for CPD opportunities using elements of existing modules and also development of taster modules for the PgDip/MSc.
- iii) Cognisance is taken of the dependency on a small team to drive the programme and the need for the School to continue to monitor the staffing resource in light of continued success with student recruitment.
- iv) Clarify where formative assessment exists in the modules and which elements are formative or summative.
- v) Consider broadening the tasks and diversity of assessment within the portfolio assessment.
- vi) Review the currency and length of reading lists, ensuring up-date referencing and consider the inclusion of the recommended authors.
- vii) Ensure that the learning outcomes are written at level 7 (e.g. in the Research Design module) and reduce the number of learning outcomes for the dissertation.
- viii) As the Course Team have been extremely innovative using e-pedagogies, further examples could be included in the commentaries (section B2.8 Creativity, Innovation and Good Practice).

24. APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked the Faculty Team, Revalidation Unit Coordinator and Panel members for their contributions to the revalidation process.

The Revalidation Unit Coordinator thanked the Panel and Chair, and the Head of School of Education thanked the Course Team for their time and work on the submission, the Panel and the Academic Office representative for her support.