

## UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

### REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 14: HISTORY (UNDERGRADUATE / POSTGRADUATE)

25 June 2018

- PANEL: Dr M Keenan, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment, Ulster University (Chair)  
Mrs A Shepherd, Lecturer in Nursing, School of Nursing, Ulster University  
Dr M Frame, Reader in History and Associate Dean for Research and Scholarship, University of Dundee  
Dr R Higgins, Senior Lecturer in History, School of Social Sciences, Humanities and Law, Teeside University
- IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs A Garland, Academic Policy and Standards Officer, Academic Office, Ulster University
- APOLOGIES: Professor R Fee, Associate Dean (Education), Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of:

Undergraduate Honours Subject: History (Single Hons/Major/Main/Minor) (with CertHE and AB exit awards) (CE) (FT [with optional DIAS] / PT);

Undergraduate Hons Subject: History (Main) [Level 6 only] at Southern Regional College (Newry campus) (Outcentre) (PT);

MA History (with PgDip exit award) (CE) (FT/PT) [2 intakes – September and January];

MA Irish History and Politics (With PgDip exit award) (CE) (FT/PT) [2 intakes – September and January].

The Panel initially met with the Head of School of Arts and Humanities (Dr T Maguire) and the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator (Dr K Hughes). The provision was then discussed in more detail with the Course Teams.

## 2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation in advance of the meeting:

- (i) course submission;
- (ii) the University's Guidelines for Revalidation Panels;
- (iii) the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for History (December 2014);
- (iv) the QAA Statement for Master's Degree Characteristics (March 2010);
- (v) external examiner reports for the last two years;
- (vi) preliminary comments from Panel members;
- (vii) Academic Office notes on regulatory and standards matters;

- (viii) Minutes of Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings;
- (ix) a report from students studying BA Hons English and History at Southern Regional College;
- (x) a report from a BA Hons History final year student at Coleraine.

### 3 MEETING WITH SENIOR STAFF

#### 3.1 FACULTY STRATEGY

The Panel began by asking the Senior Staff to explain how the provision fitted within the overall vision of the Faculty and School. The Panel was informed that the Faculty's aim was to achieve recognised academic excellence in a Global context, through research, and to expand and promote the Faculty's postgraduate provision. Ways of increasing the appeal of the postgraduate provision and attracting more international students, such as online delivery, were being considered. The Panel was advised that a summer school took place on the Magee campus and that this was used as a marketing tool.

The Head of School explained that the new School of Arts and Media operated across the Belfast, Coleraine and Magee campuses, with the History and English provision being delivered at Coleraine. As a consequence the most popular subject combination was History and English. The Panel was informed that the History provision was offered from pre-degree level, delivered at Southern Regional College, through to Master's and PhD.

#### 3.2 NEW UNIVERSITY LEARNING AND TEACHING STRATEGY

The Panel enquired how the launch of the University's new Learning and Teaching Strategy on 26 June had been taken into consideration in preparing for revalidation. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator stated that the provision had been updated in accordance with information on curriculum design that had already been circulated and that the Team had worked closely with the University's Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP) to ensure that the learning, teaching and assessment aligned closely with the new Curriculum Design Principles.

#### 3.3 EMPLOYABILITY

The Panel enquired how employability was embedded within the provision. The Head of School advised that the School worked closely with the Employability Department and that new employability initiatives included graduate Boot camps, student conferences and one-to-one career coaching. The Panel enquired if these initiatives were part of a School strategy and was informed that the Boot camp was a Faculty initiative. The Panel then enquired how the employability aspects of the provision would be supported. The Head of School advised that the School had only been in existence since August 2017 and that the Faculty was also newly formed. All of the expertise from within the newly created School would be considered and employability would be supported by support staff within the School.

The Panel was advised that opportunities existed for students to undertake short work placements and that the School was in the process of introducing a standardised work placement module template across all of its programmes. The module co-ordinator for this module would be supported by subject-specialist tutors from the different programmes within the School.

### 3.4 OPTIONALITY WITHIN THE UNDERGRADUATE PROVISION

The Panel noted the proposed number of optional modules available in the undergraduate programme and enquired how these were resourced with such a small Course Team. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator explained that there were two reasons for offering so many optional modules: firstly feedback from students indicated that they preferred a choice of modules and secondly the number of optional modules enabled a large cohort of students to be spread more widely across a greater number of modules, thereby avoiding large classes which were not conducive to a good student experience. The Head of School added that the number of available options prevented modules having to be double taught. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator assured the Panel that optionality within the provision had been discussed by the Team and that a range of optional modules was currently offered.

The Panel enquired how an even distribution of students across the modules would be managed. The Head of School explained that students would pre-select their options at a module fair prior to registering online. Students would list their module preferences in order and would then be assigned modules. As the process by which modules would be assigned was still to be finalised, the module fair would be implemented from the September 2019 intake. The Panel was informed that a module fair was used for the English provision within the School and it worked well. The School recognised the importance of managing students' expectations.

The Panel enquired if there would be a cap on the number of students for each module. The Head of School advised that each module would be capped at around 12 – 15 students, but that the intake was usually around 48 students so it was not envisaged that the number of students wishing to take any given module would exceed this cap. In response to a question from the Panel, the Head of School stated that the minimum number of students to ensure viability of a module was ten. As there was no mechanism in the online registration system to cap numbers on modules, it would be necessary for students to have made their choice before registering online.

The Panel suggested having core options to enable a student to follow a particular stream through the programme. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator advised that modules were strategically placed within the programme. The Panel enquired what would happen if a member of staff went on leave and was informed that, in such circumstances, temporary members of staff were available to provide support. Under the University's Sabbatical Leave Policy resources would be allocated to cover staff taking sabbatical leave. In cases of long-term sick leave, support was available from a pool of part-time staff or Doctoral researchers or, as a last resort, the stream would be cancelled. The Panel was advised that students were not guaranteed an opportunity to pursue a specialist area throughout their degree and that the provision was considered more of an opportunity to study a diverse range of topics. The Student Handbook stated clearly that all modules were subject to availability.

### 3.5 MAXIMUM AND MINIMUM COHORT SIZES

It was noted that, at its meeting on 14 March 2018, the University's Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee had agreed that Evaluation and Revalidation Panels should consider minimum and maximum cohort sizes for programmes and that these recommendations should be based on the minimum number of students required to

ensure course viability and a quality student experience, with the maximum cohort size based on the physical and human resources available to deliver the provision.

The Head of School stated that there were 48 full-time undergraduate students in the academic plan and that there was a healthy number of applicants for the September 2018 intake to the postgraduate provision. The Head of School stated that consideration would have to be given to the maximum and minimum cohort sizes for each programme and committed to forward these figures to the Academic Office once they had been agreed within the Faculty and School.

#### 4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with two final year BA Hons History students. In addition, written reports were received from a third final year BA Hons History student and from the students on the Level 6 History provision at Southern Regional College.

##### 4.1 POINTS MADE BY STUDENTS STUDYING AT SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

The report from the students studying History (Main) at the Newry campus of Southern Regional College was very positive overall. Points raised in the report included:

- heavy workload in final year with dissertation due same day as final exams; students suggest submitting dissertation before Christmas;
- students preferred face-to-face rather than electronic feedback;
- the existing mechanism for student consultation provided only a limited means of having student views heard;
- no representation on Staff/Student Consultative Committee;
- very little input into course although views were sought for revalidation;
- overall experience has exceeded students' expectations and they would highly recommend the course.

#### MEETING WITH FINAL YEAR BA HONS HISTORY STUDENTS

##### 4.2 BEST ASPECTS OF PROGRAMME

The Panel began by asking the students what they considered to be the best aspects of the course. One of the students stated that there had been 50 students in the whole year group and a maximum of 25 in a class which had resulted in a good relationship between class members and with staff. The students reported that the current Course Director, Dr Hughes, had made a number of positive changes to the course.

The Panel enquired to what extent students had influenced the new curriculum being brought forward for revalidation. The Panel was informed that the student course representatives met regularly to discuss the provision and that issues raised included the pressure of examinations and the students' dislike of having to submit coursework in hard copy as well as electronically. The students stated that any issues raised had been addressed.

The Panel asked the students what, in their view, was the most important thing they had learned from studying History. One student stated that she had learned a new way of writing which involved forming and putting forward an argument. The other student stated

that History was not simply about dates, but required consideration of patterns and of the background and context of an event.

#### 4.3 CONTENT AND OPTIONALITY

When asked for their views on the optionality within the programme, one student stated that the range of optional modules was limited as a number of History staff had now left the University. The student stated that the course mainly focused on late Nineteenth Century History and that he would have welcomed the inclusion of more Irish, Early Modern and American History modules. The student had however found the module on Australian History to be interesting and praised the enthusiasm of some members of staff whose classes were interactive and incorporated interesting teaching methods. The Panel was informed that many students did not undertake the set reading for seminars, which was disappointing for those who had made the effort.

#### 4.4 STUDENT SUPPORT

The students praised the high level of support and pastoral care they received from staff who, in their view, made every effort to deliver a quality programme despite significant cutbacks in staffing resources.

#### 4.5 RESOURCES

In response to a question from the Panel, the students advised that they did not have full access to electronic journals in JSTOR and that they were required to log in as Magee students. In addition, some of the library material could only be accessed on-campus. The students did however state that this was in the process of being addressed. The Chair stated that the Panel would raise this issue with the Team.

#### 4.6 CAREER ASPIRATIONS / EMPLOYABILITY

The Panel asked the students what their career aspirations were. One student stated that she had very much enjoyed studying a broader range of topics at University than she had had opportunity to study at school and that she would like to teach History in a school and introduce a broader range of topics that would be more interesting to study at A-Level than those she had studied. The other student stated that he would like to have undertaken the MRes but that this programme had now been withdrawn. The student stated that the MA History did not appeal to him as he enjoyed studying American History and Early Modern history but the MA focused more on the study of late Nineteenth Century History. Working as an education officer in a museum appealed to the student or perhaps undertaking a PhD at some point in the future. The Panel enquired if students had been advised of PhD opportunities. The students stated that they had not received any information about PhD opportunities and had received very little information about the Master's provision.

The Panel asked the students how aspects of employability had been incorporated within the programme and was informed that employability sessions were taken by staff from the Career Development Centre but that these sessions were perceived as a 'tick box' exercise. A Postgraduate Fair had been held on the Belfast campus, but no information had been forthcoming in recent months regarding career opportunities. The students had met with staff individually to enquire about postgraduate study but were of the view that such opportunities should have been advertised more by the School. One student stated that she would have liked to have received information about the PGCE course and

reported that she had not been aware of the opportunity to volunteer in schools under the Tutoring in Schools programme.

The Chair thanked the students for taking the time to meet with the Panel and wished them well in their studies and future careers.

## 5 MEETING WITH UNDERGRADUATE COURSE TEAM

### 5.1 CURRICULUM DESIGN PROCESS

The Panel asked the Team to outline the curriculum design process and was advised that members of the Team had met on a regular basis to discuss curriculum design and that close attention had been paid to the new Curriculum Design Principles in revising the curriculum for revalidation. The Team had attended two workshops lead by CHERP on employability, new teaching methodologies and assessment. The Team stated that importance had been placed on broadening the portfolio of assessment methods and offering as much optionality within the programme as possible.

The Panel enquired how students and employers had been involved in the curriculum design process and was informed that the Course Director had met regularly with the course representatives to discuss thought processes and obtain the students' views on the programme. Final year students had been interviewed at the time of submitting their dissertations to find out their views on best practice. The Team advised that these interviews would be shown to next year's dissertation students. The Team stated that students were central to the design of the programme and that discussions were underway regarding the possible acquisition of a room to be used as a Student Hub.

The Panel enquired if an Employer Advisory Board had been established for the provision. The Team advised that, although there was not yet a formal Employer Advisory Board, Team members had talked to PGCE colleagues who were in close contact with schools and had set up a meeting to discuss how best to interact with local school teachers. A member of the Team had also attended meetings and workshops at museums where ideas for future modules had been discussed. The Panel was of the view that an Employer Advisory Board could easily be established as contacts were already in place and it would only be a matter of formalising these. The Chair advised that a framework for Employer Advisory Boards had recently been launched.

The Team also advised that employers' views of History graduates had been researched online and, as a result of findings, the use of Excel had been incorporated into modules and assessments. The Team further advised that History-related employers would be invited to speak to students. The Panel was informed that practical skills modules, which included a work placement, had been introduced at the last revalidation but that these modules had been very demanding in terms of staff resources and that a decision had therefore been taken to withdraw these modules and instead to embed employability skills within modules across the curriculum. As part of the *Making History: Skills for Historians* module History graduates were invited to talk about their employment and the Museum Studies and PGCE Course Directors had also come to talk to History students. In addition, a Tutoring in Schools programme offered opportunities for students to undertake placements. The Chair reported that the students had been unaware of this initiative. The Team however advised that the Tutoring in Schools module co-ordinator came to speak to

students in first and second year and that information about this was included in the Student Handbook and circulated in emails.

## 5.2 CONTENT

### 5.2.1 Optional Modules

The Panel expressed concern that the number of optional modules meant this was a very onerous programme for a small number of teaching staff and asked the Team to explain the rationale for the inclusion of so many options. The Panel was advised that the Team wished to offer as many options as possible and that five optional modules had been offered per year on the programme for many years. The Panel enquired how the Team had decided which optional modules to include and was advised that the modules related to the research expertise of the Team members. The modules were strategically placed within the programme to ensure a balanced workload for staff. All Team members taught at each level of the programme with each member of staff teaching a maximum of three modules. The choice of optional modules had been discussed as a Team to ensure the best fit of options and coherence within the degree. The Team confirmed that all optional modules would be offered each year and that the number of modules would result in smaller classes and a more positive student experience. The Team also advised that students demanded optionality and, whilst there were not specific strands students within the programme, there were options available at each level if a student wished to pursue a particular strand at each level of study.

The Panel noted that no co- or pre-requisites had been built into the programme and queried if these might be needed to ensure coherence given there were so many optional modules. The Team stated that the first year modules prepared students well for the second year modules and that, although some second year modules might be helpful for the third year modules they were not essential. The Team explained that it was the skills students acquired that provided the building blocks for progression through the course.

### 5.2.2 Employability Skills

The Panel noted the reference in the course document to Practical History modules but the Team confirmed that these modules were no longer offered and that any such reference had been included in error. Employability skills had now been incorporated into other modules. The Team gave the example of how in one of the modules outside expertise had been brought in to teach WordPress and that students had made documents for museums. The Team was giving consideration to how more practical skills could be included in the EDGE Award modules and advised that students were encouraged to participate in EDGE Award. In addition, more practical computer and digital skills, as well as engagement with social media, had now been included in the *Making History: Skills for Historians* module. Throughout the programme students were given the opportunity to engage with more practical skills, such as using Excel and Historical data sets, within a historical context.

The Panel was of the view that the inclusion of the Practical History modules would have enhanced the programme and given it a distinct characteristic and encouraged the Team to keep their inclusion under review. The Panel highlighted the importance of the Team having a clear strategic vision for the programme if the opportunity arose to recruit more staff. The Course Director stated that a member of staff with, for example, digital expertise would be welcomed.

### 5.2.3 HIS130: Making History: Skills for Historians

The Panel queried why this module was compulsory for Minor students as they would probably gain the skills taught in this module in their Major subject. The Team advised that this was an error in the course document and that this module was not compulsory for Minor students.

## 5.3 ASSESSMENT

### 5.3.1 Assessment Strategy

The Panel was very impressed by the range of assessment methods employed throughout the programme and enquired if a cohesive approach had been taken with regard to the assessment strategy. The Panel was informed that the assessment strategy had been discussed by the Team as a whole and further by a Sub-Committee. Discussions had also been held with CHERP. The Team advised that assessment had always been varied but that new methods, such as PodCasts and audio reviews had now been included.

The Team stated that the overall assessment strategy had been guided by the new Curriculum Design Principles. The Panel however noted that the assessment requirements did not conform to the expected 2,000 words per 10 credit points and queried the rationale for this deviation. The Team explained that a lengthier assessment model in final year of 5,000 words was deemed more appropriate as feedback from students had indicated that they preferred a longer assignment. The Team was of the view that a 4,000-word essay would not do justice to the requirements of Level 6. The Team stated that its preference would have been to have had 4,000 words at Level 4, 5,000 words at Level 5 and 6,000 words at Level 6 but that a compromise of 5,000 words had been agreed. The external subject experts on the Panel confirmed that for a History degree the normal length of an essay was usually 5,000 words and 10,000 words for the dissertation. The Chair stated that the rationale for departing from the University's expectation with regard to word length should be clearly articulated in the course document.

### 5.3.2 Examinations

The Panel asked the Team to explain the rationale for the reduction in the number of examinations. The Team stated that there had been much discussion regarding this and that there were mixed views within the Team regarding the appropriateness and value of examinations as a method of assessment. A compromise had therefore been reached whereby examinations were used as a means of assessment in semester two only. In line with the Curriculum Design Principles, the three-hour examination had been abolished and any examinations were now two hours. The Team stated that feedback from students had indicated that they did not like examinations. It was however noted that the QAA Benchmark Statement for History favoured the inclusion of a timed element of assessment. The Team stated that where an examination had been included in the assessment of a module, the rationale was stated in the module learning outcomes.

In response to a query from the Panel, the Team confirmed that examinations were the only anonymous means of assessment. The Panel was of the view that inclusion of anonymous assessment was good practice and suggested that the Team consider other ways in which assessment could be anonymously marked.

### 5.3.3 Assessment of Levels 4 and 5

The Panel noted the following statements in the course document:

“In certain modules and strands, formative (rather than summative) assessment is used: this is particularly the case in year one / Level 4 ...”

and

“Both levels Four and Five are assessed essentially on a pass/fail basis ...”.

In response to the expressed concern that these modules were only formatively assessed, the Panel was assured by the Team that all modules were summatively assessed. The Panel asked the Team to revise the wording of the above statements in the course document.

### 5.3.4 Formative Assessment

The Panel noted that there was reference to formative assessment in one module description but not in the others. The Team confirmed that formative assessment, the purpose of which was to provide helpful feedback for summative assessment, was available in all modules. Engagement with formative assessment was however optional and not many students availed of the opportunity. The Panel was advised that each module had a formative element and the Course Director gave an example of how he had introduced assessment by portfolio, whereby a piece of work was submitted every two weeks and detailed feedback provided. The piece with the lowest mark was then discounted in the summative assessment. The Chair suggested that the Team explore methods of formative assessment with CHERP. The Panel highlighted the importance of making explicit to students that they were receiving formative assessment. The Team advised that submission of all assignments and feedback was online and that this had been widely welcomed by the students.

## 5.4 REGULATIONS

The Panel noted that section 10.3 of the course regulations stated “In Year 2 and the final year, students enrolled for a Single Honours degree may take one elective module per year in another subject.” The Chair stated that this was highly unusual and queried the appropriateness of this for a Single Honours programme. The Chair also highlighted the negative impact this might have on a student’s second year results which would now have more significance given the change to the degree algorithm. The Team stated that students could traditionally choose a module from another subject at Levels 4 and 5 and that up until January of second year combination students could transfer to the Single Honours degree. The Team stated that taking a module in another subject was encouraged at Level 4 but that, in practice, it did not happen at Levels 5 and 6. The Chair advised that the statement at section 10.3 should be deleted from the course regulations.

## 5.5 ACCESS TO ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

The Panel informed the Team that students had reported problems accessing journals. The Team acknowledged that this was the case and that students did not have access to all sections of JSTOR. Staff had raised this issue several times and it was in the process

of being addressed. The Team assured the Panel that students were not required to read material they could not access.

## 5.6 PROVISION AT SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE (SRC)

### 5.6.1 Student Experience

The Panel noted that the feedback from the Newry students had been very positive. Dr Young informed the Panel that effort was made to make the student experience at Newry comparable to that at Coleraine and that SRC students competed with Coleraine students for University prizes, which had been won by SRC students in the past.

### 5.6.2 Content

The Panel queried why only American History modules were taught at SRC's Newry campus and was advised that this was because American History was the speciality of Dr N Young who taught the History modules at that location. Dr Young advised that the modules were varied as much as possible and that it was ensured that other areas of History were covered at Levels 4 and 5.

### 5.6.3 Dissertation

The Panel noted that students studying at Coleraine were required to undertake a 40-credit point dissertation while students studying Level 6 at SRC undertook a 20-credit point dissertation. The Panel queried the rationale for this and was advised that all students studying History at SRC's Newry campus were taking History as a Main subject with English. The 20-point dissertation was to ensure sufficient credit points were available for other modules and also because the English modules were all 20-credit points.

### 5.6.4 Cohort Size

In response to a question from the Panel, Dr Young advised that the student numbers at Newry were not capped and that next year there would be 30 students in the class.

## 6 MEETING WITH POSTGRADUATE TEAM

### 6.1 PROVISION AND PREPARATION FOR REVALIDATION

The Panel began by asking the Team to clarify what provision was being brought forward for revalidation and the Team confirmed that the MA History and MA Irish History and Politics programmes were being brought forward, both of which were currently delivered on the Coleraine campus. The MA Irish History and Politics programme had been delivered at Magee until 2014 as MA Irish History. The Team explained that the two programmes were based on common modules and that there had been closer alignment of the two programmes since the last revalidation.

The Panel enquired how the Team members had worked together to prepare for revalidation. The Team stated that, while there had been no specific preparation for revalidation, there had been ongoing discussion among the Team and revisions made to the provision since the last revalidation through the University's course revision process.

The Panel was advised that there was ongoing meaningful engagement with the external examiner and that students were asked annually for their views on the provision.

## 6.2 CURRICULUM DESIGN

The Panel enquired what input students and employers had had in the revalidation process. The Team stated that there had not been much engagement with employers and that no issues had been raised by students. The Team had been of the view that the programmes did not need to be revised specifically for revalidation as feedback from students had indicated that they were content with the design of the provision.

The Team advised that the new Learning and Teaching Strategy had been taken into consideration in the module learning outcomes and that aspects of digital literacy and employability were already included within the provision. The Panel was of the view that the employability skills embedded within the provision needed to be more explicitly stated in the documentation. The Chair highlighted the requirement to establish a joint Employer Advisory Group for the undergraduate and postgraduate provision.

The Panel queried the rationale for the use of 15-credit point modules, which deviated from the University's expectation that a module should be a minimum of 20 credit points. The Team explained that the 30-point modules had been reduced to 15 credit points in order to make the modules more coherent and because there was a 3,000-word piece of assessment for each module. The Panel stated that the justification for the use of 15-credit point modules should be made clearer in the revised course document.

## 6.3 TARGET MARKET

The Panel enquired who the target market was for the postgraduate provision and was advised that applicants were required to hold a degree in History or a cognate discipline. Students on the programme therefore included those with a strong History background as well as those from other disciplines. The Team explained that the most important skill required was the ability to write at length. Graduates of the provision progressed to positions in NGOs, careers in public service or further study in the form of the PGCE or a PhD.

The Team stated that the MA cohort comprised a mix of Ulster University graduates as well as those from other universities, including Queen's University Belfast. The Ulster University graduates constituted approximately half of the MA cohort.

The Panel reported that the undergraduate students had stated that the postgraduate provision had not been widely promoted in their final year. The Team advised that advertising the provision to undergraduate students was always a priority but that this year may have been an exception due to industrial action. The Panel was informed that there were 30 applicants for 20 places for the September 2018 intake.

## 6.4 AWARD

The Panel sought clarification on whether the provision was a linked Postgraduate Diploma/Master's or a Master's with a Postgraduate Diploma exit award. The Team confirmed it was the latter. When asked by the Panel why a Postgraduate Certificate exit award was not available, the Team stated that this would be added. It was noted that the

Postgraduate Certificate exit award would require its own aims and programme learning outcomes.

## 6.5 DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN PROGRAMMES

The Panel noted that the MA History and MA Irish History and Politics had the same programme learning outcomes and comprised the same modules and enquired how the programmes were differentiated. The Panel was not convinced that they were two distinct programmes and queried the rationale for presenting the provision as two programmes instead of one programme with pathways. The Team stated that Ulster University had a history of offering Irish History provision. The Panel agreed that not to offer a course in Irish History would be a loss but the Chair stated that much more differentiation between the two courses was required. The Team members agreed that they also would like the courses to be more distinct but that there were not sufficient staff resources to enable this. The Panel suggested delivering aspects of the provision online. The Team advised that this had been considered but that it would require more resources than were currently available to develop the online material.

## 6.6 STAFFING RESOURCES

The Panel noted with concern that the Course Director was listed as the module coordinator for all of the modules and queried if this was the case. The Team confirmed that the Course Director did teach most of the provision and acknowledged that the resourcing of the Master's provision needed to be reviewed.

## 6.7 LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

### 6.7.1 Learning and Teaching

The Panel noted from the course documentation that the undergraduate provision had dispensed with the traditional lecture/seminar model in favour of interactive workshops, but the postgraduate provision had retained the use of lectures. The Panel was concerned that students progressing from the University's undergraduate provision would not have as interactive an experience on the postgraduate provision. The Team explained that the postgraduate lectures were interactive sessions involving group discussions and presentations and acknowledged that the interactive nature of the teaching sessions needed to be more explicitly stated in the course documentation.

The Panel queried why the postgraduate provision was much more traditional in nature than the undergraduate programme. The Team stated that it was not necessary to devote as much time to generating enthusiasm and sustaining interest among the postgraduate students as they were more mature and committed to studying. The Team further advised that PhD students had in the past been found to be lacking in high level research skills and the more formal approach of the Master's provision had been deliberately taken in order to address this.

### 6.7.2 Block Delivery

The Panel queried why each module was taught over a period of six weeks instead of the full semester. The Team stated that this was related to the assessment of the modules. Previously two 30-credit point modules had been taught across the full semester, but the structure had been revised to four 15-credit point modules, with two taught at one time in a

block of six weeks, in order to encourage staff to take ownership of their modules. The Panel was informed that under the old structure, staff would have taught their topic as part of a 30-point module, but now their topic constituted a 15-point module in its own right. The Panel expressed concern about how this would impact on the student experience as a student would not have submitted the coursework for the 15-point modules taught in weeks 1 – 6 before commencing the next two modules which were taught over the remainder of the semester. The Team assured the Panel that students did not appear to have an issue with this.

### 6.7.3 Assessment

The Panel asked the Team how the assessments were designed to aid students in their transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study. The Team advised that the 3,000-word assignments for each module prepared students for undertaking their dissertation. The Panel enquired what other skills were incorporated into the assignments. The Team stated that there was much more focus on dealing with primary sources than there had been at undergraduate level and that in addition to the 3,000-word assignments students were required to write shorter pieces for seminars. Independent learning skills were developed by allowing students to choose their own assessment topic in collaboration with staff.

The Panel queried why every module was assessed by an essay and was advised that, in the Team's view, this was the most appropriate way of assessing students' knowledge of a topic. In response to a question from the Panel, the Team stated that Blackboard was not used for learning activities, such as a discussion forum, but was used more as a repository for providing additional information and material. The Team stated that the main element of the provision was the dissertation.

The Panel enquired if students received formative feedback and was advised that prior to submitting their coursework students gave a presentation for which they received feedback.

The Team stated that it welcomed this opportunity to review the Master's provision and thanked the Panel members for their constructive comments.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

### Undergraduate Provision

The Panel commended the following aspects of the undergraduate provision:

- (i) the increased module choice for students;
- (ii) the focus on skills and induction in the Year 1 *Making History* module;
- (iii) the replacement of the lecture/seminar model with a workshop model for Years 2 and 3 and the focus on active learning;
- (iv) the impressive range of assessments which shows both creativity and commitment to ensuring students engage and communicate in a wide variety of ways using good pedagogical practices and incorporating new technological developments and the innovative changes to the dissertation module – now the *History Research Project*;
- (v) the Team-based approach to curriculum design, resulting in a coherent curriculum which aligns to the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement;

- (vi) the alignment of the provision with the 5&50 Strategic Plan, particularly the widening access agenda with the inclusion of the provision at Southern Regional College and the commitment of staff to this provision;
- (vii) the excellent level of support and pastoral care provided by the Team;
- (viii) the recording of dissertation students experiences for use in teaching.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the undergraduate provision, including the provision at Southern Regional College (Newry campus), be re-approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018 – 2022), subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed, and a satisfactory response and revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 15 August 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

#### Conditions

- (i) that an Employer Advisory Board be established, in line with the recently produced framework;
- (ii) that all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed.

#### Strong Recommendation

- (i) that fuller access to JSTOR and other electronic resources be made available for students.

#### Recommendations

- (i) that the narrative in the course documentation be strengthened with regard to the rationale for deviating from the University's Curriculum Design Principles in terms of assessment requirements (word length);
- (ii) that appropriate support be put in place to help the Team deliver employability opportunities and that use be made of the University's Employability portal.

#### Postgraduate Provision

The Panel commended the following aspects of the postgraduate provision:

- (i) the commitment of staff to the discipline;
- (ii) the commitment to the retention of Irish History;
- (iii) the current number of students taking the postgraduate provision.

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the postgraduate provision, be re-approved for a period of five years (intakes 2018 – 2022), subject to the conditions and recommendations of the Panel being addressed, and a satisfactory response and revised submission being forwarded to the Academic Office by 15 August 2018 for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

#### Conditions

- (i) that an Employer Advisory Board (joint Board for undergraduate and postgraduate provision) be established, in line with the recently produced framework;

- (ii) that, with regard to programme formation, the Team give consideration to whether the MA History and MA Irish History are to be presented as two separate programmes or one MA History programme with an Irish History pathway; if retaining the two programmes, University requirements in terms of distinctiveness must be adhered to (ie the aims and learning outcomes must be different for each programme and it would be expected that modules differ to some extent);
- (iii) that all of the points raised by the Academic Office in the Appendix be addressed.

#### Strong Recommendations

- (i) that, in order to address the significant reliance on one member of staff in the delivery of the provision, creative consideration be given to how the provision can be made more sustainable and how it can effectively absorb demand at points of increase in terms of student numbers;
- (ii) that a Team approach be taken to a review of the curriculum, in particular in terms of variety of assessment methods used and to ensure alignment with the University's Curriculum Design Principles.

#### Recommendation

- (i) that students be encouraged to reflect on their learning and that the employability agenda be made more prominent within the provision.

## 8 APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked that Panel members for their valuable contribution to the revalidation exercise.

The Head of School also expressed thanks to the Panel members, the Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator (Dr K Hughes), the Course Teams and the Academic Office.