

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 5Di GLOBAL BUSINESS AND ENTERPRISE (MAGEE CAMPUS)

30 November 2017

PRESENT: Professor Paul Bartholomew, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Ulster University (Chair)
Mrs Helen Collins, Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University
Ms Stephanie Dunleavey, Lecturer in Nursing, School of Nursing, Ulster University
Professor Paul Jones, Deputy Director of International Centre for Transformational Entrepreneurship/Professor of Entrepreneurship, Coventry University
Ms Beth Picton, Snr Teaching Fellow in Accounting, Durham University Business School
Mr James Colgan, VP Academic and Student Affairs, Magee campus, 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.

- Undergraduate Hons Subject: Accounting (Main/Minor) (FT)
- Undergraduate Hons Subject: Marketing (Main/Minor) (FT)
- BSc Hons Business Information Systems (with CertHE/AB exit awards) (FT)
- Undergraduate Hons Subject: Business Studies (with CertHE/AB exit awards/Business Studies (Major) and Business (Minor)) (FT/PT) (Major/Minor FT only)
- BSc Hons Accounting with Specialisms in Management, Taxation or Information Systems (with CertHE/AB exit awards) (FT/PT)
- Graduate Certificate in Business (FT)

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
3. QAA subject benchmark statement for Accounting (2016) and Business and Management (2015);
4. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Background and Rationale

The Panel met with the Executive Dean, Associate Dean (Education), Head of Department and Associate Head of Department/Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator. The Senior Team provided the Panel with some background as to the rationale and philosophy for the curriculum

that was being presented. The Ulster University Business School was based over the University's four campuses as well as in Dublin, London and Birmingham. Over 50% of the intake for the Magee campus was drawn from the two lowest economic bands, making the transformative aspect of the Learning and Teaching Strategy very prominent. This revalidation was particularly timely, given the merger over the past year of the Department of Business and Enterprise (based on the Coleraine campus) with the Department of International Business on the Magee campus, to form the new Department of Global Business and Enterprise on the Magee campus. This provided the opportunity to rationalise both portfolios and align provision to economic need. The key changes to the provision were the withdrawal of Undergraduate Honours Subject Human Resource Management; Undergraduate Honours Subject Advertising; and the BSc Hons Business Administration; and the introduction of a new Enterprise stream into the Business Studies provision as well as a new part-time mode.

A research-led and informed curriculum was now more pronounced, in particular with the appointment of the new Head of Department whose background was very much research focused.

The revalidation reflected the rationalisation of provision, the balance of recruitment across the University, alongside the matching of staff expertise and economic need of the area. This was only the first step in the ongoing development of the new Department of Global Business and Enterprise at the Magee campus.

It was noted and clarified that the apparent decline in predicted numbers was not as a result of demand, rather they reflected current geographical trends. In fact, in some cases demand exceeded supply.

The newly formed Department and the Enterprise stream which had been introduced reflected the expertise of Coleraine staff in this area. It was hoped that the feeder schools in the Coleraine area from which students had been recruited, would continue to feed into courses at the Magee campus. There was a real need for students with strong enterprise skills and for new venture creation and it was the view that student numbers would only increase going forward. It was the vision to be the leading entrepreneurship provider in the UK and for the Department of Global Business and Enterprise to be a Centre of Excellence in this field. Furthermore, one of the Department's unique selling points was the opportunity for students to undertake specialisms in taxation or information systems as part of the Business Studies course.

With the establishment of the new Department, the Panel enquired how it fitted into the overall Ulster University Business School (UUBS). The Senior Team noted that this was always one of the challenges of being multi-campus along with the coming together of two different cultures. A change and transition team was in place to assist the process. Staff had many opportunities to collaborate with colleagues from other departments and this engendered a very collegial approach across the UUBS. An Innovation Group consisting of Head of Department also met regularly to consider the totality of the UUBS, revalidation exercises and to have a perspective on the broader picture. Below senior team level, Heads of Department disseminated higher-level information to their staff teams and regular discussion took place at course team level.

3.2 Internationalisation

The Panel noted the real sense of local identity coming through in discussions but enquired as to international aspects of the provision and international student numbers. The Senior Team advised that the School's international student numbers had increased 20% on the previous year. Three Associate Deans – in Education, Global Engagement and Research and Impact - were also now in post and these would add considerable value in this area. The civic

agenda was very important but internationalisation of students' outlook was equally so. Parochialism was discouraged and students who chose to undertake placement were always encouraged to look internationally. Internationalisation was embedded into the programmes and across the majority of the modules. Enterprise skills were essential to survive in the global economy.

The Panel enquired in relation to any aspirations to increase international student numbers and what steps were being taken in this regard. The Senior Team advised that international students were an asset to a course in relation to the diversity of culture and practice. The Department already utilised its Chinese scholars and students in this way, as well as through peer-to-peer learning in mixed student groups. Practitioner backgrounds of many of the staff also provided opportunities for internationalisation as well as being able to draw on these links for guest speakers. Considerable work was being carried out in this area and around raising student awareness of international opportunities alongside encouraging international students to engage with activities to integrate and socialise with 'home' students. The Department also had plans to consider offering a summer school for its Chinese students to provide an all-encompassing academic and social experience.

The Panel felt that the course document did not specifically reflect the work already being undertaken by the Department around internationalisation and, as a result, the School was underselling itself. The Senior Team advised that internationalisation was intrinsic in the normal day to day work of the Department and was embedded throughout its provision so was not perhaps set out as explicitly as it might have been. Internationalisation was also used as part of assessment rubrics which clearly demonstrated its importance across the provision.

3.3 Blended Learning

The Panel asked the Senior Team to provide some information on the blended learning opportunities for students. It was noted that the UBS had engaged with fully online programmes since 2003 and use of the VLE and online technology was simply inherent in how they operated. Delivery included face-to-face, via BlackBoard Learn, BlackBoard Collaborate for example, for online videos, discussion boards, announcements, peer-to-peer exercises and to maintain regular contact with students. The VLE was also used for the electronic management of assessment and feedback. Staff were provided with training in relation to the use of online technology in order that they were able to provide students with the best overall experience.

3.4 Career Development and PDP

The Panel asked how Senior Management provided leadership in terms of students' career development and PDP, from first year through to final year. The Senior Team advised that career and placement preparation commenced for all students in year 1. The BSc Hons Business Studies with Specialisms course was currently participating in a HEFCE project 'Levelling the Playing Field through Work-Based Learning – Addressing Differential Graduate Employability Outcomes'. One of the aims of the project was to increase the uptake of placement by students from disadvantaged backgrounds and as part of the project, students were provided with opportunities to develop people management and socialisation skills from Year 1 onwards. The Department enjoyed excellent links with the community and contributed significantly to the socio-economic development of the region. The new Professional Skills Development module was aimed at developing work-based skills and was compulsory for all students.

3.5 Revalidation Process

When asked what part, if any, students had played in the revalidation process, the Senior Team advised that staff had a good relationship with students and students were at the centre of everything that they did. Student feedback was continuous and helped to inform curriculum developments on an ongoing basis.

3.6 APEL

The Panel had heard many examples of the Department's widening participation agenda and enquired how APEL was applied and managed. The Senior Team advised that a clear APEL policy was in place. A mapping exercise was undertaken against feeder programmes and for students entering at different points of Ulster programmes. Staff worked very closely with Subject Partnership Managers in relation to articulation. The same process was utilised for mapping to professional programmes.

It was noted that a part-time student could potentially take up to nine years to complete but the Senior Team advised that this occurred exceptionally, but provided assurance that if it were the case sound systems were in place to ensure that this was managed appropriately by module co-ordinators, course directors and course teams. Retention and progression within the Department was good.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a representative group of nine students from across the provision and different years of study.

4.1 Career Development/PDP

The students advised that in first year to date there was little focus on career development but that this increased significantly in Year 2 where there was a strong focus on placement and preparation for it. Students gained experience in preparing for interviews including the use of scenarios which had proved extremely useful. In final year, a student who had already undertaken a placement, advised that a lot of assistance had been provided in relation to preparation for work and other options following graduation.

4.2 Student Experience

Students noted the challenges in the transition from Year 1 to Year 2 and the increase in what was expected. The use of the 'flipped classroom' had also been a challenge and it was the general view that face to face was a better use of a student's time and much better facilitated asking questions throughout the lecture. They had chosen to come to Ulster to have face-to-face delivery rather than undertaking a fully online course at "the Open University". The students, however, advised that issues around this had been raised and satisfactorily addressed by the Course Director.

When asked what their experience had been to date, both positive and negative, the responses included the following:

Challenges

- The transition from Year 1 to Year 2 in the Accounting course; and from Year 2 to Year 4 for those who had undertaken placement.
- Referencing had been challenging although *Ref Works* classes provided by library staff had been well signposted and very beneficial.

Positives

- The one-to-one support provided by library staff.
- The element of the Digital Strategy and Communications module in which students were provided with a demonstration in the library in relation to finding academic journals, referencing and academic writing.
- The excellent range of modules in the Business Information Systems course which covered areas including economics, business, accounting and computing. This was very useful for a student who is unsure in which area they are most interested in pursuing. It provided core competence and facilitated making an informed decision.
- The ability to transfer course from Accounting to Business Studies.
- The partnerships with local charities and working with real businesses to provide real life and meaningful business proposals and solutions.
- The very hands-on and personal support provided by staff and which was far and above other institutions when compared to by students who had transferred into Ulster.
- The excellent Careers team and the very beneficial support provided.

4.3 Transition

The Panel asked those who had undertaken a placement if they felt they had the opportunities in final year to use the skills and experience gained during that time. Students confirmed that they really felt much further ahead of students who had not undertaken a placement particularly in relation to the softer skills, for example in respect of time management. The students noted that it had been a struggle returning to final year as there had been no reintroduction. Students were simply expected to return along with students progressing directly from Year 2 and this had been a challenge. They suggested a recap period would be very useful in enabling students to settle back into University and academic life.

4.4 Resources

All students confirmed that there were no issues in relation to resources. They informed the Panel that BlackBoard Learn was used daily for a range of matters, daily emails were received from staff and library resources were excellent. Overall, the facilities at the Magee campus were more than adequate.

Students had access to an extensive library catalogue of books and journals and were able to access a wide range of hard copy texts and e-books, the latter being particularly useful for those who lived some distance from campus.

All students were of the view that support and guidance on using online resources was excellent and that as a result of being fully informed in this regard, students made good use of such resources.

4.5 VLE

The Panel enquired what student expectations were in relation to the use of technology and the VLE. All students were satisfied with how it was used but added that this was also very much due to the lecturers themselves and the support they provided. Staff used the VLE to signpost students to particular sources, to upload additional course/lecture/module material, and general staff/student interaction. The students did point out the importance of using the VLE alongside face-to-face and not online only. Online was useful for reference or revision but not for first view of a topic as it was important that students were learning from their three hours in class rather than spending this time answering questions, as was expected in a 'flipped classroom' approach.

The students advised the Panel that they used online peer-to-peer discussion boards on BlackBoard Learn which all found very useful, as were online videos posted by staff. In relation to assessment, students were able to access past questions and sample answers which again was very helpful.

4.6 Assessment

Students were generally not in favour of assessment by group work at Level 6 as they were of the view that this took elements of their final year assessment out of their own control with other team members perhaps not being as motivated. All students acknowledged the importance of group work in Years 1 and 2 and in encouraging socialisation and integration with other students as well as for developing essential employability skills such as team working and social skills. One student informed the Panel that her self-selecting final year group assessment had worked very well where each member of the team had brought particular strengths and personalities. Students also informed the Panel that peer assessment was used for group work so this put some of the control back in the hands of the group. This was useful if any member was deemed not to be contributing and marks could be changed to reflect this. Lecturing staff supported students well during all group work tasks and could intervene if necessary.

When asked about assessment in general, no student had any issues and informed the Panel that their assessment load was manageable. On one occasion three class tests had been 'bunched' and students were able to choose to take these over a three consecutive weeks rather than a few days. This demonstrated that staff listened to students and took steps to address issues where possible. Everyone acknowledged that you had to put the work in to get good results.

Students noted that all lecturers maintained an overview of assessments and deadlines not only for their own module but also across the course as a whole, and that there was always a degree of flexibility in ensuring that students did not have multiple concurrent assessment deadlines.

4.7 Revalidation

The Panel asked to what extent students had been involved in the course revisions and revalidation. The students advised that there were opportunities for feedback on the course/modules on an ongoing basis but not specifically for revalidation. Lecturers knew their students well and were always open to tailoring to student needs as well as always being available and approachable.

4.8 Internationalisation and Placement

The Panel enquired as to how well international students were integrated into the student group. Some students advised that there was a small number of French and Spanish exchange students but that they tended to keep to themselves and that integration with the full group was something that could perhaps be improved.

None of the students in attendance had undertaken a placement outside of the UK, however, they informed the Panel that they were made aware of international placement opportunities. Students noted that funding was frequently a barrier against undertaking an international placement and the decision often came down to affordability.

Support was provided in sourcing a placement with organisations with whom the Department had links and frequent contact and support maintained throughout. Students could also find

their own placement outside of this if it was appropriate but the same support and contact was provided throughout the placement period.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 Academic Skills

The Panel asked the Course Team how academic skills were developed in the programmes - was this embedded within the programmes or through individual module content? The Team advised that these skills were developed through a combination of the two. The Academic and Career Enhancement Skills (ACES) module in Year 1, and to which staff from the library also contributed, was compulsory for all students and it developed academic referencing and writing from the outset with the aim of producing independent learners. The diverse student group in Year 1 introduced students early in Semester 1 and the seminars facilitated one-to-one engagement. The ACES module covered a wide range of skills including a group task where students were involved in community outreach where they worked in a real-life project with local charities. Student feedback to date on this module had been very positive and they enjoyed the challenges that it entailed in problem solving, for example. Alongside this specific module, academic skills were constantly being further developed and supplemented through assessments in other modules.

5.2 Student Transition

The Panel outlined to the Team how the students had found the transition back to University post-placement challenging and had suggested that a call back week in advance of the start of semester would really help in overcoming the challenges in their return. The Team acknowledged that this was an interesting and very important point and that returning placement students were always more receptive to skills from the considerable experience gained on the year out. It was noted that Final Year groups comprised students returning from placement as well as those progressing straight from Year 2 and that a transfer of skills audit could also prove very useful. This was something that the Team would consider going forward.

5.3 Enterprise and Entrepreneurship

The Panel noted the importance of having an underpinning philosophy for the programmes and enquired as to the nature of this in relation to enterprise and entrepreneurship. The Team advised that its philosophy was concerned with the delivery of relevant students who would be able to contribute to the economy in a meaningful way. For example, in Accounting, the common first year allowed students to undertake 'taster' modules to enable them to make an informed choice. Professional, employability and enterprise skills were all interchangeable names and these aspects were embedded throughout all provision. The Team added that a student could undertake a self-employed placement in Year 3 and that a very supportive structure was in place in this regard. Funding, although vital for students in self-employment, was not currently available internally, however, options were currently being explored with outside agencies. Two members of staff were currently involved in a related HEFCE project which had demonstrated the process worked but funding had been the stumbling block in bringing anything to fruition.

The Department worked closely with the local council in facilitating student pop-up shops and with other community providers in relation to supporting students both locally and further afield.

It was noted that a business incubation hub was available at the Coleraine campus and staff based there had worked with the local enterprise agency for a number of years. It was the intention going forward to develop similar facilities and opportunities at the Magee campus.

The Panel noted that the QAA Guidelines for Enterprise and entrepreneurship education (2012) had not been referred to in the documentation or in the development of the courses. The Team confirmed that this had informed course developments although had not explicitly been referred to in the document.

5.4 Accounting courses

The Panel noted the extensive work undertaken to date towards employability, however, with particular reference to the Accounting programmes, asked how the Team ensured a balance between the professional aspects alongside ensuring that students were prepared for an academic role. The Course Team stated that when recruiting to Accounting courses, prospective students generally focused on the number of professional exemptions they could obtain. The professional content was very closely aligned with the professional bodies and module content developed around this, however, other non-specifically professionally aligned modules also contributed to the course. Academic skills and critical analysis were developed across a range of modules and in written assessments and essays. The Final Year project as part of the *Leadership and Strategy* module was very much linked to an academic environment.

The Team also informed the Panel that their own current research informed their teaching and they acted as academic role models for students. Doctoral students within the Department often led seminar sessions and this provided further exposure to the academic environment.

The Panel enquired how innovation was intellectualised and students encouraged to develop these skills. In respect of teaching innovation, the Team advised that it was concerned with conceptualising the whole area and showing how fundamental innovation was to all subjects. They endeavoured to instil this in the students by strongly embedding it across modules from the outset of each course. A strong sense of academic enterprise existed within the Department and this was embedded in live projects as well as applied student projects through the Science Shop initiative which allowed students to see the full circle.

5.5 Group Work

The Panel advised the Team of the students' views on group work and that they were not in favour of its use at Level 6. The Team explained that some staff use peer-to-peer assessment and self-selecting groups but that they are always able to intervene as required if an issue arises. Group work created a competitive edge in students and a true sense of teamwork which was an invaluable learning experience. Students would be awarded for creativity and innovation but content was obviously equally important. Staff could see that the strongest group work tasks could only have been achieved through good teamwork. The mix of students, for example, Computing or Business Studies students really drew out each other's different and complementary skills.

5.6 Preparation for Revalidation

The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator, who was also recently appointed Associate Head of Department, outlined how the Team had approached the revalidation. This process had commenced by the rationalisation of provision that no longer fitted in with where the Department wanted to be now or in the future. This had involved taking the Enterprise expertise at the Coleraine campus and introducing it as a Business Studies specialism to replace Human Resource Management. Meetings had been held throughout the process with all staff at both campuses; professional bodies were involved; focus groups held with students; as well as liaison with placement providers and graduate employers. In developing the

courses for revalidation, the new curriculum design principles had been taken on board. Links with the local council, SMEs and other external agencies had also informed course revisions.

A new part-time mode for Business Studies was introduced as well as two additional employability modules, the Year 2 module being specifically redesigned in line with the HEFCE recommendation. Everyone had worked together well as a team and it had very much been a team effort.

Links with the Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment had also informed the cross-faculty aspects of the programmes. The experience and expertise of the staff in the Department in terms of their external examiner roles at other institutions also informed their own curriculum as well meeting the aims of Ulster's 5 & 50 Strategy.

The Team added that the Department was on a journey of continuous improvement and that this was very much a work in progress.

5.7 Engagement with Students

The Panel enquired how staff engaged with students on an ongoing basis and was advised that in addition to formal mechanisms including Staff/Student Consultative meetings and module feedback, staff encouraged open and frank discussions directly with students throughout and at the end of each semester. This also complemented the role of Adviser of Studies. Some module co-ordinators had also implemented one-to-one feedback sessions. Staff were very receptive to student feedback and endeavoured to address issues as they arose. The student voice was very much at the forefront and students were very aware that they could approach staff for academic and pastoral matters.

5.8 Assessment

The Course Team confirmed that they were well advanced in the implementation of online assessment and feedback and it was the exception for it not to be used.

The Panel noted that examinations comprised many of the assessments across the programmes and that these were mainly three hours in duration. When questioned as to the rationale, the Course Team advised that for some programmes this was due to professional body requirements and having to ensure that particular topics were assessed – this was very typical for Accounting programmes. For other modules, it was recommended that the use of three-hour examinations be reviewed and for consideration to be given to reducing these to two-hours if examination was still viewed as the most appropriate assessment method.

The Panel noted the use of one text to outline module content (examples being *Foundations of Entrepreneurship* and *International Marketing*) and stated that this did not demonstrate good practice and should be reviewed.

The Panel queried the use of 'UUBS generic marking criteria' and noted concern that this was being utilised. The Course Team, however, clarified that generic criteria were used as a starting point and that for each module specific marking criteria were also applied. The Team noted that generic criteria were a useful tool for First Year modules in particular as students were able to see clearly the different grade boundaries.

5.9 Modules

The Panel raised a number of other module-specific issues which would be addressed in the Academic Office appendix, including:

- Management Accounting 1 – 8 hours of exams across the module – assessment strategy should be reviewed.
- Managerial Finance 2 – Level 6 module outcomes were not using verbs appropriate to that level.
- Management Accounting 2 – learning outcome 1 – the word ‘appreciate’ should be replaced with something more meaningful; learning outcome 2 – this should be split into two separate outcomes resulting in five learning outcomes for this module, which was deemed acceptable.
- Corporate and Capital Taxes – the Level 6 learning outcomes were not capability focused and needed to be reviewed.
- Operations and Supply Chain Management – the wording of learning outcomes 1 and 2 ‘Develop a knowledge of’ as well as the assessment of a 3-hour examination and 2,000 word assessment were required to be reviewed.
- Business Intelligence – review the number of learning outcomes (currently 11 in total); review assessment strategy for the module and the current 6% for a 3,000-word report.
- International Marketing – assessment was to be rationalised.

The Panel also encouraged the Course Team to consider the core texts in module reading lists in terms of academic robustness and noted the message being given to students in the use of a professional text as a core text.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

- i) The comprehensiveness and quality of the course documentation;
- ii) The cohesiveness of the course team, in particular in the context of the bringing together of the two departments on the Magee campus;
- iii) The passion of the team for the students and the outstanding personal support provided to students;
- iv) The approach to employability and the excellent embedding of ethics throughout the programmes.

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 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 2 March 2018** 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, including a number of issues raised by the Panel, are addressed;

Recommendations

- i) To consider reviewing the reading lists to ensure that they reflect an appropriate balance of academic and professional texts and as part of this review ensure that the reading lists (sections 4.4 and 4.9 refer);
- ii) To consider the implementation of transition support for critical points throughout the student journey but in particular for returning placement students (sections 4.2, 4.3 and 5.2 refer);

- iii) That the Course Team ensures that they link into opportunities in the Derry/Londonderry area for entrepreneurship, as the Enterprise expertise moves from the Coleraine campus (section 5.3 refers);
- iv) For the future, that the course team articulates explicitly in course documentation their good practice across various transition points including from school to university and module to module which was clearly evident during discussions.

7 APPRECIATION

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