ULSTER UNIVERSITY

REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE REVALIDATION PANEL FOR UNIT 15A HOSPITALITY

2 February 2018

PRESENT: Professor Paul Hanna, Associate Dean (Global Engagement), Faculty of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment (Chair)
Mr Mike Flynn, Principle Lecturer in Hospitality, Cardiff Metropolitan University
Dr Nick Hubbard, Principal Lecturer, Department of Logistics Operations, Hospitality and Marketing, University of Huddersfield
Dr Deirdre O'Connor, School of Agriculture & Food Science, University College Dublin
Mrs Ursula Chaney, Lecturer in Nursing, School of Nursing Ulster University

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.

- BSc Hons Consumer Management and Food Innovation (with CertHE/AB exit awards) (Consumer Issues Minor) (FT/PT) (CE)
- BSc Hons Leisure and Events Management (with CertHE/AB exit awards) (FT/PT) (CE)
- Undergraduate Hons Subject: International Travel and Tourism Management (Single Hons) (with CertHE/AB exit awards); International Travel and Tourism (Major) (with CertHE/AB exit awards); Travel and Tourism (Minor) (FT/PT) (CE)
- BSc Hons Culinary Arts Management (with CertHE/AB exit awards) (FT/PT) (BT)
- BSc Hons International Hospitality Management (with specialism in Tourism) (with CertHE/AB exit awards) (FT/PT) (BT)

2   DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

1. Course submission;
2. Guidelines for Evaluation and Revalidation Panels;
   QAA subject benchmark statements for Events, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport and Tourism (2016); and Agriculture, Horticulture, Forestry, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Sciences (2016);
3. Preliminary comments from Panel members.

3   MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Panel met with senior staff from the Ulster University Business School and Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management, including Professor Mark Durkin (Executive Dean), Professor Heather Farley (Associate Dean (Education)), Professor Una McMahon-Beattie (Head of Department) and Ms Ursula Quinn (Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator).

3.1   Background and rationale

In response to a question from the external Panel members who queried the rationale for BSc Hons and not BA Hons awards within the Department, the Senior Team provided some contextual information. The Ulster University Business School (UUBS) was striving to become the leading centre for entrepreneurship by 2021 and of key importance was the thinking and acting around the different opportunities. All the provision was very employability focussed but at the same time very academically challenged. The uniqueness of the fully functioning commercial Academy Restaurant also helped to underpin all of these programmes. It was noted that tourism was worth some £821m annually to the NI economy and the Department's provision also very much aligned to Ulster's strategy in being a civic university. The awards being BSc had been agreed following considerable debate at institutional level some years previously and in order that all courses within the UUBS were the same award.

3.2   Evidence of Demand

The Senior Team advised that based on their knowledge of the available market they had forecast an intake of 40 students per programme. From an institutional perspective, the Panel were advised that the UUBS had its own Business Advisory Forum as well as the Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management having its own business advisers for academic planning. The Panel was also advised of the MaSN cap on numbers which existed in NI and that numbers had to be managed both in line with industry need and within this constraint.

In the Northern Ireland context and the Belfast area in particular, considerable expansion was ongoing within the hospitality and tourism industry. The Department also enjoyed good links with key partners including the Hastings Hotel Group and provided extensive CPPD opportunities for staff at all levels within the industry. The number of schools offering courses in hospitality and tourism had also increased and the Department used its strong links with schools to encourage students to consider further study in this area. There were also a number of related Foundation degree courses across the NI regional colleges that provided a feed into the programmes (in the region of 35-40 students each year).

The Panel noted that the demand for International Hospitality Management appeared to shrink but was advised that this was due to the MaSN restriction and having to balance the intakes coming from the foundation degrees in the colleges.

In relation to the profile of the Foundation degree of 240 credit points, the Panel queried why students were required to undertake additional modules of bridging. The Senior Team informed the Panel that the credit points which Foundation degree students undertook comprised a large proportion of work based learning. Insufficient evidence could be demonstrated that they met all the programme learning outcomes of years one and two of the relevant degree course or the required knowledge to undertake some of the final year modules. It was pointed out that bridging also introduced students to University and assisted transition from college. It was a University-wide requirement for which students gained stand-alone credit.

In relation to part-time student numbers, the Senior Team advised the Panel of its ongoing strategy to increase non-MaSN recruitment and, in doing so, had been working closely with the Employability and Marketing Department around a digital campaign in this regard. This strategy would increase the number of CPPD programmes to address any skills deficits identifies within the industry. It was also noted that many of the students progressing from Foundation degree level moved to part-time mode in order that they could continue to work whilst undertaking the degree.

3.3   Study Abroad and Placement

The Panel noted the compulsory nature of placement or study abroad but queried the credit weighting of each – 120 and 60 credit points respectively. The Senior Team advised that this was an institutional stipulation but that for study abroad students built up credit points for two semesters at the other institution but that the placement (DPP or DPP(I)) was more concerned with developing employability skills with no requirement to attend any classes. The compulsory nature of the placement was not the norm in other universities but the Senior Team recognised the vital importance of work based learning for this industry. It was also very much aligned to the learning outcomes of the relevant programmes. Academic staff acted as placement tutors and worked very closely with students and employers in relation to preparation for and support during placement.

Going forward, the Senior Team advised of plans to open a cookery school in the new restaurant when it relocated to the new build and this would provide students with opportunities to develop excellent employability skills and graduate work ready.

The DIAS (study abroad) and DPP/DPP(I) were both freestanding qualifications across the University. A fewer number of students availed of the DIAS opportunities but examples of where study abroad had been undertaken included USA, Sweden and Malta, at institutions with which the Department had collaborative links.

3.4   Resources

i.   Digital resources

All programmes were delivered through blended learning and the Senior Team was asked how it would be ensured that all students had access to digital resources as part of their course. The Senior Team advised that if any additional resource requirements were identified to enrich the student experience or to resource educational requirements, the resource to cover these would always be found. Digital elements were incorporated into a number of modules and a key highlight was noted in relation to a JISC award won for the Academy App. In relation to any specific software requirements, the Senior Team advised that any investment in this area would be resourced – this aligned to the Digital Strategy across the University. The use of technology was about infusing all learning in the digital environment and the Department in many ways had pioneered this.

ii.   Staff Resources

The Panel had noted the removal of the WSET and other wine teaching from the provision due to the retirement of two key members of staff and was of the view that this would weaken provision in this area. The Senior Team advised the Panel that only one particular member of staff had recently retired but had been retained on a consultancy basis and to offer a short CPPD course. There was also the opportunity for other staff to develop their own knowledge in this area. The Senior Team highlighted that a student had previously won the Sommelier of the Year, the only student in Ireland to ever have done so.

ii.   E-books

The Panel enquired if there was any requirement to have at least one e-book per module as a required text but was advised that this was not the case. The Department had an excellent library resource and a core strength was the support provided by it subject librarian with whom staff worked very closely. There was a library strategy to move to e-book provision but that this work was ongoing. Many of the reading list texts were already available as e-books but that this was not explicit in the document.

3.5   Progression and Success rates

The Senior Team highlighted the Department's extremely good attrition rates of 5.88% and the excellent work being done by staff in relation to retention and progression and the support they provided around this. Introductions to academia, school visits to the Department and a pre-induction event, for example, for prospective students informed their choice and ensured the right students came onto the right courses which facilitated good retention and success rates.

3.6 Ulster EDGE award

The Senior Team advised that staff requested all students to enrol on the EDGE award and continually encouraged them to complete the different activities therein, however, the latter could be challenging. A number of students, however, had gained the EDGE Excel award which was commendable.

3.7 Restructuring

The Senior Team advised that the Department had not been affected in any major way by the ongoing restricting within the University in respect of staff resources but that natural wastage had now brought about a natural staffing level. If additional staff were required, there were no barriers to prevent this.

In relation to the language and business provision no longer being available at the Coleraine campus, this had resulted on a decrease in the number of students undertaking the major or minor subject strands. The Department, however, was currently considering other subject options with which to combine in the future.

3.8 Electronic management of assessment and feedback

The Panel enquired as to the Department's progress to date in line with the University's Online Assessment and Feedback Policy and that all assessment and feedback should be fully online by 2020. The Senior Team advised that a plan was in place and work was ongoing in this regard. This included a staff development session, assistance from ADDL and the fact that the Head of Department had now made peer supported review in this area compulsory (PSR). Many staff were already using this and online submission of assessment and availability of marks and feedback online was already the norm. The Department did not currently offer any courses fully online, only in blended learning which was also used for CPPD activity and part-time students. The nature of the CPPD market, in particular, and the three-day teaching blocks, supported by the resources on BlackBoard Learn, was clearly the way forward and the Faculty as a whole was very focussed on the digital learning strategy.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a representative group of 24 students from across all years and programmes.

The students came from a range of backgrounds – for example, those who had worked for a number of years in the industry, part-time students, from a relevant Foundation degree and others directly from school.

The Panel noted the University's aspiration "To provide transformative, high quality, learning experiences through the promotion of meaningful staff-student partnerships that engender a shared responsibility" and asked for the students' views on this. All students agreed that a shared responsibility existed. The Academy Restaurant provided excellent opportunities for all students but, in particular, the supervisory role provided in year two. Staff in the Consumer

Management and Food Innovation programme provided excellent support, as did staff from the other courses. Students who undertook bridging from a Foundation degree and were now studying part-time really felt that staff were committed to ensuring that they were supported and were also very understanding of the undertaking the workload around other external commitments.

4.1   DPP/DPP(I) / Study abroad

A number of students had already undertaken the DPP/DPP(I) and this had been an excellent and well supported process both before and during and contact was frequent through emails and Facebook, for example. One face-to-face visit normally took place during the placement. If any issues did arise, they were very quickly and effectively addressed. It was suggested that the availability of management positions was sometimes limited.

All students recognised the contribution that the hospitality and tourism industry made to the NI economy but noted that some did not recognise this as a career initially, however, this perception was changing for the better.

4.2   Group work

The students gave mixed feedback in the use of group work, mainly around concerns about some students not contributing equally to the assignment. Lecturers were able to intervene where there were issues around non-participation of which students had made them aware. Some students indicated that they had the option of being assessed individually. All students were required to complete a group work sheet at the end of the task and on which they could provide comments on all aspects of the group assignment. Overall, however, all students recognised the benefit of group work in developing confidence, teamwork and other soft skills.

4.3   Peer mentoring

The Panel asked the students to provide them with details of how peer mentoring worked in practice. Many of the students were peer mentors themselves and would provide information to new students which fostered good student relationships across the years as well as providing support and guidance to each other.

4.4   Feedback

During discussions, the variable nature and level of feedback that students received was evident to the Panel and that this very much depended on the individual lecturer. The students advised that assessments were submitted through Turnitin and feedback would normally be received within two weeks of submission. The mark was accessible on BlackBoard Learn but sometimes the feedback was minimal. Some students did state that staff would send feedback via email but that the level of written, oral or level of detail could vary between modules. It was important for the students to get feedback on strengths, weaknesses and improvements and this was included in assignment feedback sheets. It was also noted that an examination feedback clinic was due to be held shortly but some students would not be available to attend. When asked if they had raised any issues through the SSCC or course representatives, some students confirmed that they had already received assistance in this regard. Some final year students were only now only recognising the importance of good feedback.

4.5   Student learning experience

All students were of the view that the links with industry and the excellent support provided by staff greatly enriched their experience and developed their digital literacy and employability skills throughout the programmes. The development of these skills commenced at the outset to include academic writing, referencing, CV writing, mock interviews and general networking. The Ulster EDGE award and Tutoring in Schools activity also provided excellent opportunities to develop employability skills and add to your CV. Central aspects such as finance and human resources were also covered in the curriculum and again this was important from an employability perspective. In the e-business module students were given the opportunity to present a Dragon's Den type pitch.

During discussions, the following general points were also highlighted:

- Marketing and promotion materials had been informative and accurate.
- The excellent relationship between lecturing staff and that this was reflected upon the students.
- The very approachable and supportive staff – students could see that all staff had industry experience and this greatly enriched the programmes.
- Staff communicated with students regularly in relation to working in the industry as well as highlighting any relevant job opportunities.
- The strong industry links which provided opportunities for students to get involved in live business consultation and development, for example, at the Bullitt Hotel, Hastings Hotel Group and local almond milk supplier.
- Students could raise issues through Staff/Student Consultative Committees and course representatives and directly with staff at any time by email.
- There were no issues in relation to accessing library and IT resources or the level of these resources. The induction process covered all aspects and ongoing support was provided by staff in those areas as required.
- Course induction was well planned and very informative. Work was also ongoing with the Students' Union to include an increased interaction using social media.
- Level 6 only contribution to the degree classification and this was not favoured by students – students were advised, however, that the University was currently considering a new degree algorithm, the final outworking of which was still to be confirmed.
- All students would recommend coming to Ulster and undertaking any of these courses. Some already had siblings in the Department and this was a great support.

The Panel thanked the students for their engagement and wished everyone well in their future studies and careers.

5   MEETING WITH COURSE TEAMS

5 .1   Revised curriculum

The Panel asked the Course Team to outline the main changes and the rationale for these as part of the revalidation process. The Revalidation Unit Co-ordinator advised that the process started some twelve months earlier and the team had engaged widely with a range of stakeholders including current students and graduates, the industry panel, placement providers, employers. The new curriculum design principles had also been incorporated into the programmes. No major changes had been made to the curriculum, only enhancements in line with staff expertise and industry need and this had strengthened the programmes.

Each of the course directors advised the Panel of the main changes made to their course and which were also set out in the commentaries section of the course documentation.

In the Consumer Management and Food Innovation course, the process had included the identification of any gaps in the curriculum and the introduction of new modules including one

around quality control, to ensure that students were work ready. It was also noted that the progression route for many of these students was to a PGCE. DLHE data was also considered and had informed discussions.

In the Leisure and Event Management course, the curriculum revisions had been informed by discussions with, for example, industry representatives and consultations with students. Three main changes had come about, mainly around technology, an increased need for practical experience and the overall impact of events in society. As a result, three new modules had been introduced.

In International Travel and Tourism Management, similar consultation had taken place. A new module Media, Creativity and Experience had been introduced in year 1 to provide a context earlier in the course, as well as other module revisions and enhancements elsewhere which had all been informed by feedback from industry.

The Culinary Arts course was benchmarked against similar courses at other institutions as well as consultation was undertaken with industry to enhance the curriculum and cover what industry required.

International Hospitality Management had a strong focus around the Academy Restaurant and the excellent opportunities for students from a fully operational commercial establishment and live case studies. Feedback from employers had informed curriculum revisions including a broadening of scope, the development of graduate skills in final year to ensure that students were career ready and had the required practical leadership skills.

5.2   Placement/Study abroad

The reason for there being no compulsory placement in the Consumer Management and Food Innovation was that many progressed to a PGCE so staff did not wish to add another year to what would potentially already be four years of study.

The Panel enquired what steps were taken to reintegrate students returning from placement/study abroad back into the university. The Course Team advised that from experience they found that returning students had matured and had learnt a great deal from this year out. In final year, a programme was in place to reintroduce students back into the academic environment as well as a debriefing session around their experiences and the final year workload. Students would be reintroduced to the library and were provided with any required support around academic writing and research skills, for example. Returning students were also asked to speak to second year students who were about to go on placement/study aboard and this peer to peer guidance and assistance was extremely beneficial.

When asked if the placement would be better suited between years one and two, the Course Team were not of the view that students were industry ready at that time. The five months between these first two years were, however, used to encourage students to undertake a work placement. This was also a good preparation for the longer period after the following year's study.

From discussions with the students, the Panel asked if students were ever placed in management positions. The Course Team advised that this depended on availability and also the profile of the individual student. For many students the international experience at an operative level was also very beneficial. Even graduate management programmes placed students into operational roles to start with, the advantage of which being to be able to reflect on the whole management profile.

Provision would be made for those who were unable to find a placement or could take a year's leave of absence and then submit a portfolio of work experience gained. They would, however, not gain the DPP/DPP(I) award but would be able to progress to final year. No student would be disadvantaged and every step would be taken to place all students.

A robust process was in place to assess the suitability of the placement. Students were provided with a placement handbook and were invited to a farewell seminar which covered all aspects before going out on placement. During placement staff and students maintained regular contact via email and Skype and if possible, staff would undertake a face-to-face visit.

The Course Team confirmed that the DIAS/DPP/DPP(I) did not provide any credit weighting towards the degree but that it was a separate stand-alone award and gaining two qualifications was vitally important in the industry. Students must pass the placement but most excelled in this aspect. It was confirmed that students would be provided with an opportunity to resubmit if they missed the deadline.

In relation to study abroad, these were to institutions where the lectures would be delivered in English. All students received the same support during study abroad as they did when out on placement and both options were equally promoted. The fact that the DPP/DPP(I) was a paid placement often informed the decision on which option to choose.

It was noted that the uptake of study abroad was low but this was also constrained by the number of students that other institutions were able to host. The removal of the language options at the Coleraine campus also impacted on options for students but the study abroad provided excellent opportunities to build confidence and knowledge and their international perspective.

5.3   Course content

The Panel noted the apparent overlap in Hospitality Operations with the Management Accounting module in terms of decision making and that pre-requisite knowledge was required. The Course Team advised that Management Accounting was an optional module but that its content was beyond the accounts in terms of the role of a business manager and future sustainability of the business. Performance analysis was a key skill and indeed was identified a skills deficit within the industry. The module co-ordinator clarified that no overlap existed between the two modules and increasingly students were seeing the benefit of undertaking the optional Management Accounting module. When asked why this module was not compulsory the Course Team did not wish to force students to do an accounting module, as this was an area in which many students were not interested and simply avoided at all costs.

The Panel enquired how the key contexts within industry were covered in the programmes and the Course Team informed them of the modules within each of the courses which covered areas such as Irish sporting events, contemporary consumer issues, global food issues, for example. Within the BSc Hons Consumer Management and Food Innovation course considerable work had been undertaken around food poverty which was a very current issue.

The Course Team advised the Panel that the curriculum design principles had informed the programme structures. A number of 'generic' modules were delivered across courses which the team viewed as a strength in that they were able to offer a wide range of modules to students. In relation to parity across teams, this was achieved through a good range and balance of assessments.

The Panel noted that the stand-alone level 4 study skills module had been removed and subsumed within other modules but more specifically in the Media, Creativity and Experience

module. The Panel could not determine where in this module study skills where being addressed. The Course Team informed the Panel that this was not intended to be a like for like module but would build on what had already been covered through induction, mentor and other guidance. Feedback from students on the stand-alone study skills module had not been favourable and much discussion had been undertaken before the decision had been made to replace it. Embedding these skills within the curriculum was more effective. It was important to see the relevance of the new module and how the study skills were being developed. All staff recognised the importance of academic skills and a consistent and structured approach to their development was in place across the Department.

The Panel was further advised that the University had recently introduced an online facility for students 'Studiosity' through which students were able to develop academic skills by submitting draft work for academic feedback. This did not replace the delivery of study skills within the courses but was very useful and student uptake was steadily increasing.

Clarification was provided in relation to the assessment in the Business Research Methods module. In small groups, students were required to select a journal article following which they had to read it and write a critique. Mixed methodologies were encouraged, however, this depended on the subject area. The concept behind it was to encourage increased engagement with academic journals and for students to have a more critical eye.

The Panel sought clarification on the content of the Transportation Operations in Tourism module as it currently appeared to be based solely on history. The module co-ordinator provided clarification that only one lecture covered a history aspect and set out what else was covered. It was recommended that the content of this module be reviewed to accurately reflect what was actually being covered.

The Panel asked for the team's view on the new 40 credit point shared module Food and Beverage Operations which would be delivered over semesters 1 and 2 of year 1. The Course Team advised that this module was based around the Academy Restaurant and each semester provided students with the opportunity to fully experience both the front and back of house. It included a break point assessment at the end of the first semester to ensure that students were on track to pass the module and to allow for early intervention to mitigate any such risk.

5.4 VLE/BlackBoard Learn

It was noted that BlackBoard Learn was not specifically referred to until late in the documentation but that the curriculum was delivered through blended learning. The Course Team confirmed that the fact that it was not explicit was because it was implicit and the delivery of all of the curriculum was immersed in technology and the use of the VLE. This included module handbooks, lecture materials, email, use of e-portfolios, reflective journals, and discussion groups. Commentaries could also be recorded on GradeMark and ShareStream was used to upload video content. This facilitated the development and enhancement of students' digital skills and staff undertook development sessions to ensure that they themselves had the required skills.

5.5 Assessment and Feedback

In relation to electronic assessment, Turnitin was used by all staff and the Department was very much in line with the Online Assessment and Feedback Policy and in meeting the policy

objectives. The Course Team also assured the Panel that a system of second marking was also in place.

In relation to the provision of feedback, the Panel noted that student feedback in this regard had been variable during the earlier meeting. The Course Team advised the Panel of their approach to feedback and in making students aware of what feedback was. Formative feedback was provided which would feed forward to summative assessment. Clear assessment criteria were given to students on every assignment as well as briefs and examples of good practice and grades of work. The Department operated a two-week turnaround policy but this could be extended to the standard three weeks if required.

All students were made aware of assessment and feedback in the module handbooks and strengths, weaknesses and improvements would be fed back to each student on the module feedback sheet. Marks and comments would also be posted on BlackBoard Learn.

5.6   Part-time students

The Panel enquired specifically how part-time students were assimilated in the learning environment and was advised that they were provided with the same support, advice and guidance as full-time. In relation to placement, they were also encouraged to take a year out from their current role in order to refresh and update their knowledge, skills and practice.

It was the aim going forward to increase part-time numbers but this was a challenge that required a very flexible framework as these students would generally already be working full-time.

5.7   Student experience and graduate qualities

Ulster's student experience principles and graduate qualities were very much embedded in all programmes. Graduate qualities including internationalisation, employability, digital literacy, research, ethics and sustainability were achieved through the curriculum and the strong links with industry locally, nationally and internationally greatly facilitated this.

Staff worked continually in partnership with students and through mechanisms such as SSCCs, course director meetings and mentor programmes and for revalidation had also consulted with current and former students.

It was noted that the Department would be offering an examination clinic later in the month which provided the opportunity for both staff and students to feed back issues.

The research/teaching nexus was very much embedded throughout the curriculum. All staff were research active and research engaged, and their research and expertise informed and led the curriculum. This was assisted by the use of real life case studies and guest lecturers to deliver both an enriched curriculum and overall student experience. The overall approach was very much student focused and student led through the utilisation of peer assessment. The fully operational Academy Restaurant provided students with excellent opportunities to develop the practical elements of the courses and students had given very positive feedback to date in this respect.

6   CONCLUSIONS

The Panel commended the programmes on the following:

i) The complete reflection on the current provision.
ii) A clear and coherent rationale for the overall provision, driven by the needs of several of the stakeholders the most important of which are the students.
iii) Quality of the documentation.
iv) The pre-induction event.
v) The very positive comments from students on the staff and programmes
vi) The clinic for feedback on examinations and to give consideration as to the day on which this was held.
vii) The very strong and cohesive course team.
viii) The very positive NSS results.
ix) The excellent links with industry regionally, nationally and internationally.

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 May 4 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 are addressed;

Recommendations

i)   To keep under review the approach to study skills to ensure consistency and completeness of coverage (section 5.3 refers);

ii)   To review the content of HTM345 Transportation Operations in Tourism module   in line with what it actually entails in practice (section 5.3 refers).

Comments

i)   To review with student representatives the whole aspect of feedback styles and approach – a real disconnect was evident in staff and student perceptions.

ii)   To ensure that students are aware of and fully engaged with peer mentoring.

7   APPRECIATION

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