

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

REPORT OF THE REVALIDATION MEETING FOR UNIT 3G: REGULATORY AFFAIRS (JOINT AWARD WITH UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN (UCD))

8 February 2018

PANEL: Professor B Murphy, Director of Access Digital and Distributed Learning, Ulster University (Chair)
Ms C Reid, Ulster University Business School Partnership Manager, Ulster University
Professor J Scudamore, Professor of Livestock and Veterinary Public Health, Institute of Veterinary Science, University of Liverpool
Dr T Hill, Senior Lecturer, Institute of Cellular Medicine, Faculty of Medical Science, Newcastle University

APOLOGIES: Ms H Rooney, Vice-President Campaigns and Communications, Students' Union, Ulster University

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms B Molony, Deputy Director of Quality, University College Dublin
Mrs K McCafferty, Academic Office, Ulster University

1 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

The Panel met to consider the revalidation of the following provision:

PgCert Veterinary Public Health (VPH) [Part-Time/Distance Learning] [Joint award – UU and UCD]

PgCert/PgDip/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs [Part-Time/Full-Time/Distance Learning] [Joint award – UU and UCD] [UCC contributes]

PgDip/MSc in Food Regulatory Affairs (VPH) [Part-Time/Distance Learning] [Joint award – UU and UCD]

The Panel was given a presentation by Mrs Aine MacNeill, Instructional Design Consultant, Office for Digital Learning, on the digital learning environment, Blackboard Learn. The presentation provided an overview of the Blackboard Learn resources available for staff and students, as well as the suite of tools available.

A presentation was also given by Miss Joan Atkinson, Sub-Librarian for the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, which provided an overview of the Library services, including support available to students and staff and the various ways to access library resources and services.

Food Regulatory Affairs is an interdisciplinary and evolving subject area which integrates science, law and policy as applied to the regulation of the entire food chain from pre-harvest to final consumer. Students who choose to study on the programmes come from backgrounds in agriculture, veterinary medicine, food science, food safety, law, consumer studies and environmental health.'

Both the Food Regulatory Affairs and Veterinary Public Health programmes attract students from the UK, Republic of Ireland, other European states, Africa, North America, Australia and Japan.

The PgC/PgD/MSc in Food Regulatory Affairs was first validated in 2002 and is offered in both part-time and full-time modes. The programmes was accredited by the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST) in 2016. The IFST is the leading qualifying body for food professionals in Europe and the only professional body in the UK concerned with all aspects of food science and technology.

The PgCert in Veterinary Public Health was introduced in 2007 along with a subject specialism pathway through the PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs leading to PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health). The PgCert in Veterinary Public Health is offered on a part-time basis by distance learning over two semesters and applicants must hold a degree in veterinary medicine and normally have a minimum of one-year post qualification experience prior to the start of the programme.

The PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health) is also delivered in part-time mode through distance learning and students must have a degree in veterinary medicine.

Graduates from the PgCert in Veterinary Public Health, PgCert/PGDip/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs or PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (VPH) receive a joint award from Ulster and UCD.

2 DOCUMENTATION

The Panel received the following documentation:

- Course Submission
- Ulster University Guidelines for Revalidation Panels
- QAA subject benchmark statement for Master's Degree (September 2015)
- External Examiners' Reports for the last two years
- Preliminary comments from Panel members

3 MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

3.1 Overview

The Panel noted that the programmes were innovative and current and was a long-standing provision within the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences. The Senior Management Team stated that the programmes met the key objectives of the Faculty in relation to growing postgraduate provision. There were close links between the Faculty and University College Dublin in the sharing of expertise. The Panel also heard that the Faculty had a strong research team and that their work filtered into all the programmes. The Senior Management Team explained that the provision offered flexibility in meeting the diverse needs of students by being offered both on a part-time and full-time basis through distance learning.

The Senior Management Team emphasised the importance of keeping the content of the provision up-to-date. The Panel noted that since 2002 the number of modules had increased to reflect the many topics relevant to the subject area.

3.2 Collaborative Arrangements

The Panel asked the Senior Management Team to elaborate on the collaborative arrangements between Ulster University and UCD. The Panel appreciated the long history and working relationship between the two institutions but wished to find out more about how the joint arrangements worked.

The Senior Management Team explained how the relationship had evolved and the processes followed which resulted in the foundation of a joint award including governance arrangements, financial arrangements and procedures for graduation.

The Panel noted three Course Committee meetings took place each year between the two institutions. The Committee was comprised of representatives from UCD, Ulster University and other external contributors to the provision. An 'Away Day' was organised each year and held at the Belfast campus. Course Teams from both Ulster University and UCD attended to discuss the provision and sort any issues. The Senior Management Team emphasised that both groups of people were in constant contact with each other.

The Panel enquired about the External Examiner's role and if this involved the development and enhancement of the provision. The Panel heard that a new External Examiner had been appointed in the past year. Previously there had been two External Examiners, one for Food Regulatory Affairs and one for Veterinary Public Health but the Panel noted the new appointee had a background in both subject areas. The Senior Management Team explained that the External Examiner visited both universities and sometimes attended the course committee meetings. The Panel noted that the External Examiner was provided with a selection of scripts from different student levels to give an impression of the quality of student work. The Senior Management Team informed the Panel that the Course Team responded to the External Examiner reports and took specific suggestions for improvement and enhancement into considered. The Panel also noted that the External Examiner looked at the Master's projects.

The Panel asked if student transcripts showed that it was a joint award and noted that both institutions were identified and as both universities used different grading systems this was also clearly shown.

3.3 Mode of Delivery

The Panel noted that students could study the PgC/PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs programme on a full-time or part-time basis and asked if there was a real need for the full-time mode. The Panel also felt that the documentation made more reference to part-time delivery.

The Senior Management Team explained that initially the programme was only offered in part-time mode to students who were currently in employment. However, the Panel was informed there had been an increased interest from recent graduates who wished to study the programme on a full-time basis. The Panel noted that only students who were not currently in employment could enrol on the full-time programme. The Panel heard that only two students had completed the programme on a full-time basis but that the Senior Management Team wished to keep the option available. The Senior Management Team also confirmed that there was only one intake per year onto the programme.

3.4 Student Experience

The Panel noted that students could initially register on the PgC or PgD Food Regulatory Affairs but that some students chose to leave after completing the PgC. The Panel was conscious of the student experience should only three students, for example, enrol for a particular module. The Panel also asked how small student numbers would affect online discussions.

The Senior Management Team explained that some of the modules were shared with other programmes within the School and the mix of students worked well. The Senior

Management Team also stated that more students tended to enrol on the PgD Food Regulatory Affairs programme.

3.5 Staff Resources

The Panel enquired about staff resources and asked why only Ulster University staff had been identified in the module descriptions. The Panel asked where the input was from UCD. The Panel also commented on the impressive list of professors connected with the provision and asked how their expertise was fed into the provision.

The Senior Management Team explained that Ulster University's Curriculum Management System (CMS) had been used to generate the documentation and at the moment did not accommodate the insertion of the names of external contributors. The Panel noted that the programmes had been running for many years and that many of the current staff had been involved throughout this time.

The Senior Management Team explained that Ulster University was responsible for the management of the provision on a daily basis and that the Course Team at UCD contributed to the content of the programme. The Senior Management Team also stated that Food Regulatory Affairs was rapidly changing and that they relied heavily on a large number of internationally renowned people to contribute to the provision.

3.6 Programme Structure and Content

The Panel asked why there was not mention of 'food fraud in the programme content'. The Senior Management Team explained that they try to keep the provision up-to-date by searching for new topics. The Senior Management Team acknowledged 'food fraud' was not covered but informed the Panel they were currently working with experts in the field to develop an appropriate set of lectures.

The Panel asked how often students had face-to-face contact with their lecturers and noted tutorials were synchronous with the lecturer speaking and presenting slides. The Panel also noted that students were also able to ask questions at the same time. The Senior Management Team explained that discussion boards provided the opportunity for students to ask questions and receive answers. The Panel noted that e-tutors followed these discussion boards and were able to clarify any issues raised by the students afterwards.

The Senior Management Team explained to the Panel that the introduction of 'Blackboard Collaborate' was an excellent tool in accommodating 'live' lectures and allowing interaction from the students.

The Panel asked if e-tutors were trained and how this valuable student support was managed. The Panel heard that the e-tutors had been involved for a significant length of time with the delivery of online programmes. All e-tutors were provided with training and their work was monitored regularly to ensure consistency. The Senior Management Team also explained that the system allowed them to see the engagement between the e-tutors and the students and how issues raised by students were addressed.

4 MEETING WITH STUDENTS

The Panel met with a recent graduate of the PgC in Veterinary Public Health who enrolled on the programme following a recommendation from a past student. The student informed the Panel that her intention had been only to do the Postgraduate Certificate but as the experience had been enjoyable was now completing her Masters. The student felt that the

online delivery of the programme worked well and that without the support of the e-tutors it would have been more difficult.

The Panel asked the student if she felt it had been a joint award and noted that the Postgraduate Certificate in Veterinary Public Health had involved more staff from Ulster University. With regards to the Masters, the student stated that she had more connection with UCD and that her supervisor was from UCD. The student informed the Panel that there was good support and guidance from her supervisor.

The Panel enquired about active learning with other students and noted that the student had initially been concerned about this. However, the student felt the discussion boards had been useful and being able to email the other students and interact with them had worked well.

The Panel asked the student if she had studied the 'Research Methods and Biostatistics for Food and Nutrition' module and noted that she had really enjoyed it. The student considered the module to be well presented and she explained she had been able to go through examples in real-time.

The Panel asked the student how she had found the PgC in Veterinary Public Health and noted there had been a large amount of lecture reading material. The Master's programme consisted of more presentations. The student felt that the videos and PowerPoint presentations made it easier to take in the information. The lecture notes were considered long and more difficult to digest. The student felt the discussion boards were invaluable for bouncing ideas around.

The student informed the Panel module evaluation forms were completed and that there was an opportunity to provide feedback.

The Panel asked the student if the PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health) should be retitled Veterinary Public Health (Food Regulatory Affairs) and noted that she would welcome a review of the title.

The Panel appreciated that students on distance learning programmes needed to be disciplined and asked the student what happened if someone did not log on regularly and if there was an awareness that someone was tracking student activity. The student explained that she was committed to the programme as she was paying for it.

The Panel asked about induction and noted there had been a 'quiz' at the very start of the programme asking if distance learning was the right choice for her. The student felt the induction had been useful and was designed to help students focus on the programme early on.

The Panel commented on the range of assessments and noted in the Postgraduate Certificate there had been a lot of essays. The student considered these to be relevant at the time.

In the Master's programme the student explained that there were more PowerPoint presentations and not as many essays.

The student finished the discussion by saying there had been challenges at the start. The Panel noted that the student's time management had improved more and her confidence had grown. The student felt there was excellent support for students on the programme.

5 MEETING WITH COURSE TEAM

5.1 Module Structures

The Panel commented on how there were many variations in the way the modules were presented, for example, the difference in the number of seminars and tutorials that took place. The Panel referred in particular to the 'Current Issues in Regulatory Affairs' module.

The Course Team explained that the 'Current Issues in Regulatory Affairs' module was student led and that the students chose their own assignment from a list of contemporary topics. The Panel noted that students were given a tutorial on how to approach the assignment, how to carry out the research and the types of questions to be asking. The Course Team felt that this approach gave the students independence and advised the Panel that with the proper guidance they were able to cope. The Panel noted that the second assignment in the module involved a presentation. The Course Team explained that they selected the topic for the student and then gave them guidance and a tutorial explaining how to do the assignment. The Panel noted that there were no lectures in the module as it had been designed to challenge students.

The Panel also noted that the students carried out their own research and were encouraged to use their initiative. The Panel noted there were discussion boards and students could ask questions and seek further advice. The discussion boards were not timetabled and the Panel noted that some students required more help than others.

The Panel queried the number of hours allocated to lectures in the two Veterinary Public Health modules but was advised that the hours referred to lecture sets, ie, three hours of learning with some of the lectures consisting of videos which were linked to reading materials.

5.3 Curriculum Design Principles

The Panel commented on the recently introduced Ulster University Curriculum Design Principles which recommended that modules should be a minimum of 20 credit points. The Panel asked the Course Team for their rationale for retaining 15 credit point modules.

The Course Team explained that the programmes were a long-established provision and that the principles had been thoroughly discussed between the two universities. The Panel noted that it had been agreed that the existing structure was the most suitable for students on the programmes. The Course Team felt that if the modules were increased to 20 credit points the work-load for part-time students would not be manageable.

The Panel stated that they were also of the opinion that 20 credit points modules would not work in this instance. The Panel also advised the Course Team that the student they had met with had been very complimentary of the structure of the programme and felt that it accommodated students currently in employment.

5.4 Assessment

The Panel noted the assessment strategy but questioned how two essays in some of the modules could meet all the learning outcomes. The Course Team explained that it was important for students to be able to execute a critical essay. Students needed to know how to make an argument and the Course Team felt that essays helped to develop skills in critical analysis.

The Panel also noted that some of the modules had three or four pieces of assessment. This did not reflect the Curriculum Design Principles recommendation that there should be only two pieces of assessment.

The Course Team stated that they had tried to comply with the principles but that some of modules needed three pieces of work to ensure students were achieving the skills they needed.

The Panel commented on the 'Research Methods and Biostatistics for Food and Nutrition' module which the students liked and noted that this had been a bespoke module. The Course Team informed the Panel that feedback from the students on the module had been very positive.

5.5 Programme Delivery

The Panel felt that the provision was unique and coherent but that it was difficult to see the joint relationship between the two universities. In particular, the Panel referred to the module descriptions that showed Ulster University staff input but did not mention staff at UCD.

The Course Team explained that some of the modules had been designed by UCD with external input from experts in the field. The Course Team further explained that these 'global experts' were provided with the module objectives and specific learning outcomes when asked to contribute their expertise. The Course Team advised the Panel that they appreciated regulatory affairs was an area that needed to be constantly updated.

The Panel also noted that a 'Brexit Day' had recently been held at UCD. Experts in the field had been invited to come in and give their views on Brexit and what it could mean to the future of the subject area. The Panel noted that the discussions had been videoed and would be used in the future. The Course Team acknowledged that they had to work hard to keep the content current and relevant.

The Course Team also confirmed that web chats could sometimes involve contributions from experts in the field and that some of the tutorials were expert lead.

The Panel was impressed with what they heard but felt that the document did not clearly show the contributions from both universities and the expertise involved. The Panel felt that more detail should be provided in section B2 of the document on how the joint delivery of the provision worked, was managed and enhanced.

5.6 Accreditation of PgC/PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs

The Panel congratulated the Course Team on obtaining accreditation for the PgC/PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs provision and asked what the experience had been like.

The Course Team explained that the process had been long, intense and had involved a lot of detailed scrutiny. The Panel noted that although a large amount of information had been required the Course Team was pleased with the outcome.

5.7 Programme Content

The Panel commented on the 'Farm to Fork Regulation of the Food Chain' module noting that it covered a number of commodities but no mention of 'meat'.

The Course Team explained that the general principles were included in the module and that in their opinion 'meat' would require a full module of its own. The Course Team felt that it

was impossible to cover everything. The Course Team explained that students had the opportunity to address issues with 'meat' in their assignments.

The Panel also enquired where nutritional requirements and toxicology were covered and noted that both topics were included in the 'Food and Health' and 'Risk Analysis' modules.

The Panel also enquired about the inclusion of 'consumers' in the modules. The Course Team explained that every lecture now embedded the 'consumer', for example, consumer understanding, consumer choice and labels.

5.8 Master's Project

The Panel asked for clarification of the structure of MSc project. The Course Team stated that the MSc project officially started in Semester 2 and continued into Semester 3. At the end of the first year of the programme the Panel noted that students were contacted and asked to think about their project. The Panel noted that guidance was provided and students were advised that primary data was required. The Panel noted that the Course Team could provide some project titles if the student was unable to find one of their own.

During the 'Research Methods and Biostatistics for Food and Nutrition' the Course Team explained the students developed their proposal. Students were allocated a project supervisor from either Ulster University or UCD so that appropriate guidance and support was given. The Panel noted that the proposal had to be approved before commencement of the project.

The Panel noted that there was a consistent approach to supervisor duties. Meetings were held yearly between the two universities to discuss a common approach. The Panel noted that the criteria was discussed to ensure all students were treated the same and received the same experience.

5.9 Student Support

The Panel felt that the document did not clearly show the support provided to students and in particular by the e-tutors.

The Course Team explained that when a student first enquired about the programme they were asked if they felt they could commit to studying by distance learning and working at the same time. The Panel noted that no formal interview was held.

The Course Team further explained that once a student registered on the particular programme they received an induction explaining how to navigate the online system. It was also noted that the Module Co-ordinator set up a 'welcome' which provided guidance on discussion boards, a brief overview of lectures and what to expect. The Panel also noted that students were directed towards those people who could provide additional student support.

The Panel noted that students who were not engaging with the programme were flagged. The Course Team explained that students needed to be motivated and that attendance was monitored. The Panel noted that if a student has not logged on for a week this would be highlighted.

5.10 Programme Learning Outcomes

The Panel commented on the programme learning outcomes for the PgC/PgD/MSc in Food Regulatory Affairs. Although the knowledge learning outcomes for the three awards

appeared different the Panel felt the 'intellectual' 'professional' and 'transferable' skills were too similar and did not show progression between the awards.

The Course Team explained that students went on a huge journey from the PgC to the MSc and that the change in the person who graduated at the end was substantial. The Panel also noted that fewer people tended to choose to do the PgC.

The Panel felt that it would be useful to review the programme learning outcomes for all the provision to show clear differentiation between the award levels and subject areas.

5.11 Refresher Courses

The Panel asked if any alumni had enquired about refresher courses to help them keep up-to-date with the subject area. The Course Team felt that this was a good point and that they would consider the suggestion. The Panel noted that the Course Team invested a lot of time in delivering the provision and that to offer refresher courses would require additional time and money and might not be cost effective if only one or two students were interested. For those alumni who do keep in touch the Course Team stated that they directed them towards the new developments in the subject area.

5.12 Programme Title

The Panel asked the Course Team for their thoughts on re-titling the Postgraduate Diploma/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health). The Panel suggested that the programme could perhaps be retitled PgD/MSc in Veterinary Public Health (Food Regulatory Affairs). The Course Team felt that this could be a possibility and that they would consider a change.

5.13 Future Developments

The Panel asked the Course Team how they would like the provision to evolve over the next five years with regards to innovation, delivery and content. The Course Team stated that they would like to see a definitive module on creativity and innovation. The Course Team felt that such a module would be beneficial to students and would help them come up with innovative projects. The Panel noted that the students came from a variety of backgrounds and very few generated their own project ideas.

The Panel asked if there might be an opportunity to develop a module based on Brexit. The Course Team explained that it was still early days and many issues had still to be resolved with regard to Brexit.

6 CONDITIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel commended the Course Team on the following:

- The successful accreditation of the PgC/PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs programme by the Institute of Food Science and Technology (IFST)
- The development and content of the new module in Research Methods and Biostatistics for Food and Nutrition
- The tailoring of provision around the employment contexts of FRA and VPH
- The use of e-learning resources and support evident in the discussions stimulated by the Library and Access, Digital and Distributed Learning presentations, which assured the Panel of the impressive systems in place to support students studying by distance learning

- The Faculty resourcing of a dedicated e-Learning Support Unit and the essential local service it provided for distance-learning programmes
- The evident cohesion between the teams from Ulster University and University College Dublin in the operation and management of the provision, and the enthusiasm displayed by the Course Team
- The Course Team's dedication to the student experience supported by informative regular feedback and tailored support in meeting individual student needs

The Panel agreed to recommend to the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee that the provision be approved for a further 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 **8 May 2018** for approval by the Chair of the Panel.

Conditions

- (i) That the Course Team revisit the programme learning outcomes for all programmes to ensure they are sufficiently differentiated (with particular emphasis on the difference between award levels and subject areas);
- (ii) that a rationale be provided for the School's decision to maintain the use of 15 and 30 credit-point modules in light of the new curriculum design principles;
- (iii) that a rationale be provided for the School's decision to depart in some modules from the recommended two assessment items of the new curriculum design principles;
- (iv) that the collaborative arrangements between UU and UCD be better articulated in the documentation to show parity of esteem and clarity in contribution: eg, identify who contributes to the development of the curriculum and how this is formalised; who attends Course Committee meetings and Boards of Examiners meetings and when and where these are held; who delivers on modules; and membership of the Senior Management Team of the Programme;
- (v) that the regulatory and standards matters identified by the Academic Office be addressed (appendix).

Recommendations

- (i) That the governance structures at both the institutional and operational levels between UU and UCD be more clearly presented in the documentation, to show how in principle the same student experience is mirrored across both institutions;
- (ii) that consideration be given to changing the title of the PgD/MSc Food Regulatory Affairs (Veterinary Public Health) programme to PgD/MSc Veterinary Public Health (Food Regulatory Affairs);
- (iii) that the Course Team give consideration to more meaningful articulation of the structure of the delivery in each module description to indicate, for example, what an online lecture is, when tutorials and seminars are used and the contact hours (synchronous and asynchronous) students can expect with their tutors;
- (iv) that the revised documentation identify the modules shared with other programmes and explain how the distinctiveness of the provision is maintained to ensure an appropriate student experience;

- (v) that the documentation clarify how future student numbers for the provision were derived, including any market research and that the Course Team identify the organisations they engage with in promoting the programmes;
- (vi) that the documentation make more explicit how the Course Team is preparing the provision to adapt to Brexit;
- (vii) that the following be considered with regard to modules:
 - that implied topics on meat, consumers, nutrition and toxicology, for example, be written explicitly within modules as appropriate to their titles;
 - that consideration be given to content for FRA and VPH stakeholders who will drive recruitment to the programmes;
 - opportunities for students to be creative and innovative;
- (viii) that the Course Team consider adapting the 'Research Methods and Biostatistics for Food and Nutrition' module, which was considered exceptional, for other provision;
- (ix) that the Course Team consider including as an appendix a 'curriculum map', for quick reference and to ensure consistency and clarity, showing the number of credit points per module, the number of lectures, tutorials and seminars, the hours allocated, the number of assessments and the staff involved in teaching.

APPRECIATION

The Chair thanked all the members of the Panel and in particular, the external members, for their valuable contributions to the revalidation exercise.