



**Institute of Technology Sligo
INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA SLIGEACH**

PROGRAMME VALIDATION REPORT

Date of Evaluation: May 16th 2019

Programmes Evaluated:

- 1. Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition**
- 2. Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition
Post Graduate Diploma in Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition**

Unique Programme

Reference Number PRN:

Panel of Assessors:

Mr Stephen Mc Manus
(Chairperson)

Retired Registrar (DKIT)

Ms Emma Ball

Community Dietician Manager, H.S.E. Ballyshannon

Dr Michael Harrison

Head of Department of Sport and Exercise Science,
Waterford Institute of Technology.

Dr Nigel Brunton

Lecturer, School of Agriculture & Food Science, UCD

Dr Michele Glacken

Assistant Registrar
Institute of Technology Sligo

Declaration Regarding Any Conflicts of Interest

The members of the Panel signed a form confirming that they did not have any conflict of interest.

Meeting with Institute, Faculty and Department Management

Attendees:

Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition

Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

Post Graduate Diploma in Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

- Dr Jerry Bird, Head of Faculty of Science
- Dr Tomas Smyth

The Registrar provided an overview of the Institute in terms of its strategic plan, facilities, proposed infrastructural developments, TU ambitions and the required research metrics for attainment of same. Reference was made to the current HEA compact document (2018-2022) and the Institutes participation in the first of QQI's cyclical review periods, the CINNTE review cycle in April 2018. The rationale and outcome of the Department restructuring which occurred in 2018 was also shared with the panel.

The Head of Faculty shared with the programme team the developmental history of the Faculty, which has led to the construction of the current suite of Masters' Programmes. The MSc in Public Health Nutrition is TU compliant in terms of the ECTS weighting of the thesis (50 ECTS). The Head of Science informed the panel that the Science Faculty has the largest number of post graduate research students on campus so this experience will support the current programme provision.

Staffing

The panel sought confirmation of the Institute's commitment to the provision of additional staff to assist the current complement of staff deliver the programmes. Both the quantum and the quality of the staff was discussed. The panel shared their concerns that the documentation would indicate there is only a small cohort of academic staff available to service the programmes. The panel also queried if the staff have the specific expertise warranted for the Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition.

The panel were informed that there is commitment to staffing both programmes appropriately and that recruitment is planned to commence in September as the HoD and HoF believe that they have the number and expertise to deliver semester 1 modules. They also plan to bring in subject experts as required in a HPAL capacity for both programmes. It was recognised by all, that it may be challenging to recruit a person who is recognised in the field of sports nutrition and has the academic requirements for a post and/or wishes to take up a full time academic position. The panel shared with senior management the importance of recruiting persons who is able to translate the professional/ practitioners skills set to varying cohorts- elite sports personnel, local GAA teams etc. and that this criteria may be more important than a doctoral qualification.

The panel were assured that the Executive had approved 3.5 additional academic positions to support the delivery of the programmes. The panel shared with senior management the need to have evidence of this commitment in the programme documentation. The Registrar informed the panel that it is the Institute to have the EAP 1 documentation included with the programme which will include staffing commitment.

Research Base at Department level

The panel explored with senior management the research base at Department level and how this research activity will support the thesis component of the programmes and in particular the thesis aligned to the Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition. The panel assured senior

that such a programme requires ongoing research in the field by the academics who will be supervising the students. The Head of Department cited the research collaborations of two of the academics who will be central to programme delivery.

Meeting with Programme Leads & Head of Department

Attendees:

- Dr Tomas Smyth
- Ms Maire Mc Callion
- Mr Kiernan Tobin
- Dr Irina Uzhova Clinton
- Ms Laura Keaver
- Ms Azura Youell

Rationale

The programme leads were asked to share with the panel the rationale behind the development of the programmes. The team cited various reasons for programme development such as graduate feedback and the need for a progression route in the area of nutrition for the graduates of the under-graduate nutrition and sports/ exercise programmes, the need to develop programmes which would be able to contribute to the body of research in the area through their theses outputs, the gap in appropriately qualified personnel with nutrition expertise to support a growing market in nutrition advice for the general public, persons with chronic illness and elite sports persons. Government and policy initiatives such as the *Healthy Ireland Framework* also influenced the team's decision to develop the programmes, as did the absence of other programmes in Ireland which facilitate persons upskill in the area of nutrition.

Employment opportunities

The panel requested the team to convey to them the potential jobs that graduates of the programmes may have access to, on programme completion. The quantum of employment opportunities was also teased out. The programme leads detailed a number of potential employment opportunities which ranged from private practice, to working with sports clubs to Health promotion roles with voluntary and statutory bodies. In relation to the Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition, the panel discussed with the team if it was their intention was to develop practitioners who could work with teams and the programme leaders confirmed that it was. The panel felt that an indicative list of job areas or potential job titles should be part of the submission.

Delivery mode

The programme leads were asked to detail to the panel how the proposed online delivery mode would work in practice in terms of induction, student preparation and support, students input at modular level in group activity/ engagement, number of independent study hours per week, library resources etc. Online delivery from the teaching and learning and assessment perspective were also explored and in particular how some of the proposed

detailed information of how online delivery is achieved in the Institute and how the module leaders commence developing a community of learners from the onset to facilitate the students to learn and support each other. Exemplars of how discussion forums, formation of programme specific videos, chat rooms and the deployment of virtualisation supported the delivery of some of the lab sessions online were provided. The Institute's commitment to online learning was evident in the employment of instructional designers and online student advisors and the development of CELT.

The team shared with the panel their plans to have some residential onsite laboratory sessions so the students could develop competence in the conduction of some assessments. It is recognised that for international students that a decision will have to be made whether these residential blocks will be mandatory, or if they will be outsourced to centres near the students' place of residence.

The panel advised the team that the level of detail that was shared in the discussion about delivery should have been in the programme documentation.

Research

The panel asked the programme leaders whether there was the depth and range of ongoing research at department level to support the students' future research endeavours. Two of the academics present cited their involvement in a number of National and European projects which demonstrated research expertise in particular areas. These collaborations will allow students access to data sets which they could work upon for their theses. The panel discussed with the team the need to have a robust research portfolio in the Department and for the development of a Department research strategy which would focus on discrete cognate research areas. Such a development was deemed necessary to ensure that their post graduate students can produce research which is a publishable level. The panel also suggested that a research strategy that positioned the department in terms of research capability should be agreed by the department. This would focus the department on further academic development and might inform staffing decisions.

The Head of department informed the panel that the thesis was allocated 50 ECTS rather 55 ECTS like other structured Masters theses in the Department as an additional 5 ECTS had to be allocated to additional content to meet the accrediting bodies(AfN) stipulations. The panel felt that the idea of a 'structured 'master's programme was an excellent innovation and were keen to support it.

The supervision of the 50 credit research thesis that was a component of the Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition was an item of some concern to the panel as a thesis of this size acquires some of the characteristics of a full master's thesis. The panel asked what programme numbers were expected and if the team felt had sufficient supervision capacity to support same. The team expects 8-12 students on the Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition.

They team recognised that they have deficits in some areas but they hoped to recruit academics with this expertise and had informed Human resources of particular areas that expertise was required in. The Head of Department informed the panel that they would be

academic year 2019-2020 when the student numbers are known.

Accreditation/ Registration with Professional Bodies (Association for Nutrition AfN/Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition) & Sports & Exercise Nutrition Register (SEnr)/Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition)

The panel explored with the team whether graduates of the programmes will be eligible to register with the appropriate U.K. Bodies as the documentation gives the impression that they would be. The team explained that they have had significant discussions with the Association for Nutrition and have been guided with them in relation to programme content. Their experience of working with them towards seeking accreditation for the undergraduate programmes has facilitated their engagement. The team feel that graduates of the programme will be able to register with the AfN and that they can seek to do this as an individual graduate until the programme becomes recognised. The team are committed to supporting students in this endeavour and will assist them individually map the programme content with that required from the AfN.

The team have only had initial conversations with the British Dieticians Association who host the Sports & Exercise Nutrition Register (SEnr) which graduates of the Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition maybe interested in. In formulating the programme content, the team reviewed the programmes already accredited and based their content on same.

The panel stressed the need to be explicit with students from the onset about Accreditation and not to give the students aspirational rather than accurate information. They also asked the team to consider the resource implications of maintaining accreditation once received.

Objectives of the programme

The programme submission contained a set of programme outcomes that were generic and the panel felt that those objectives could be applied to any level 9 programme. The panel was anxious that the programme team should formulate, at this late stage a set of objectives for the programme that specifically described the programme and its purpose within the economy and its instrumental value to its participants.

Programme learning outcomes

The programme learning outcomes were not supplied in the programme submission. The programme team used the Level 9 science QQI standards of Knowledge, skill and competence as a proxy for the outcomes.

Programme learning outcomes are a tailored and specific implementation of the standards. They should be a series of statements indicating the particular knowledge, skills and competencies that the programme participants will achieve. They should be matched to the level 9 standards. It would appear that the module building software is determining a bottom up approach to programme design. The suite of modules determine the high level outcomes. Best practice design procedures would ensure that the necessary programme outcomes determine the modules and their content.

The panel recommended that the overall aim of the Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition needs to be developed to ensure it reflects practitioner skills. This should be included in the objectives of the programme and evidenced in the programme outcomes. The

specific knowledge, skills and competences acquired by successful participants in the course. These should be linked to the science standards to demonstrate that the programme was at Master of Science level. They should also be linked to the modules to show that the programme outcomes would be achieved by those completing the modules successfully.

Meeting with Programme team & Head of Department

Attendees:

- Dr Tomas Smyth
- Ms Maire Mc Callion
- Mr Pdraig Mc Ginty
- Dr Irina Uzhova Clinton
- Ms Laura Keaver
- Ms Azura Youell

Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition

The Head of Department furnished the panel with a revised approved course schedule as the one in the programme documentation was incomplete.

Student engagement

The panel teased out with the programme team what the schedule meant at the individual student level and whether the total effort time of 26hrs per week was realistic for post graduate students who are likely to be in employment and how they proposed to measure their actual engagement.

The team felt that it may appear onerous but that it students were provided with a detailed timetable and schedule for course assessments at the beginning of each semester so they can plan their work/ input. Their input could be monitored by their engagement with programme materials/ activities etc.

The team were asked to explain to the panel what the online delivery hours were comprised of in terms of synchronous/asynchronous delivery, webinars, group discussions etc. The panel were satisfied that the teams' prior experience of online delivery was at a level that they would be in a position to deliver the programme content in a manner that was conducive to student learning.

Programme content- General comments

The panel asked the team to consider if there was sufficient epidemiology, health economics, details on communicable diseases and health promotion in the programme. The team were able to assure the team that there was sufficient but the content was threated through a number of modules and not necessarily as a distinct module.

The specifics of the laboratory skills that were planned for the residential block were explored in terms of the rationale behind their selection and the proposed outcomes. The team were advised to select the skills carefully and be cognisant of the students future needs and the resource implications.

Module learning outcomes

The panel requested the team to review learning outcomes at modular level to ensure they were phrased at NQF level 9 and were measurable.

Assessment

The panel shared with the team their concern that minimal detail was provided on the content of the assessments and advised them that while they appreciated they could not be too pedantic at this juncture but the provisions of potential exemplars to the panel would have been valuable.

Modular level

The panel reviewed each individual modules and shared their expertise where warranted, advising on potential additional content and/or reducing content, questioning who will teach certain modules and seeking exemplars of potential assessments.

Research Thesis (50 ECTS)

In relation to the 50 ECTS theses module the panel shared with the team, their belief that the ethical approval process and thesis development timelines needs to be mapped and be explicit for supervisors and students. They queried with the team what the quality approval process for topic selection will be, and how they as potential supervisors will be supported to assume the role of supervisor for a large research study. It was evident that the issues above need to be considered further by the team and had not been to date as the thesis is not until the second year of the programme and the staffing for the programme is not complete.

Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

The comments in relation to student engagement, module learning outcomes and assessment were common to the Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition programme.

Programme content- General comments

The panel queried with the team who would make the decision on elective module participation. The team informed the panel, that the programme board cognisant of the applicant's previous academic history and/or work experience will select which elective module the student studies.

The programme access options were discussed with the team and the panel were satisfied that the Institutes RPL process was sufficient to accommodate those without the necessary academic qualifications. The focus of the programme was teased out with the team. The panel wished to ascertain if the team had considered preparing the graduates to work with the every growing numbers of the general public who are concerned with their physical health and wellbeing, in addition to the high performance sports market that the programme is currently aimed at. The team welcome this insight and assured the team that they would consider their suggestion.

nutrients as this is a growth area in Sports Nutrition.

Modular level

The panel reviewed each individual modules and shared their expertise where warranted, advising on potential additional content and/or reducing content, questioning who will teach certain modules and seeking exemplars of potential assessments.

Research Thesis (30 ECTS)

The panel sought confirmation of the time allocation to supervisors every week and advised it was 45 minutes. The panel sought clarification on how online students received supervision and were informed this was via Skype calls and email. The panel were advised of the research ethical structures that are in place.

The panel thanked the team for the participation. This concluded this session.

Decision of the Validation Panel

The validation panel recommend all programmes for approval to Academic Council.

Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition

Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

Post Graduate Diploma in Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

Master of Science in Public Health Nutrition

Conditions

1. The programme team need to make the programme aim and objectives programme specific. In their current form they are too generic.
2. The programme team need to ensure the programme learning outcomes align to the Science standards at level 9 and the module learning outcomes.
3. The programme learning outcomes need to be explicit in relation to the competencies, knowledge and skills the student should have on programme completion.
4. The programme team need to examine the learning outcomes at modular level to ensure they are NQF level 9 and measurable.
5. The assessment strategy needs to be programme specific and detailed, giving an overview of the range of assessments, conduction of assessments etc.
6. The programme delivery strategy needs to be programme specific and comprehensive dealing with all issues related to delivery such as software, VLE platform, student supports, teaching & learning strategies, student inputs etc.
7. The staffing requirements for programme delivery should be explicit and included in the programme document including a timetable for appointments and evidence of the Institutes commitment to same.
8. Module level descriptors need to be at level 9 and measurable.

Recommendations

1. The Department need to develop a coherent research strategy to inform the areas they wish to consolidate and/ or develop expertise in, and inform future recruitment.
2. The Department need to ensure there is appropriate training, mentorship and oversight to develop the supervision capacity and research subject expertise of staff, to support the roll out of the proposed 50 ECTS thesis.
3. The ethical approval process and thesis development timelines needs to be mapped and be explicit for supervisors and students.
4. The programme team need to make explicit to applicants the situation regarding accreditation with relevant bodies (e.g. Association of Nutrition)
5. The learning outcomes of the statistics module should be aligned to the programme outcomes in terms of the degree of statistical literacy required of the students.
6. The programme team need to consider the comments of the panel in relation to individual modules content/assessment.
7. The programme team need to include in their documentation a list of jobs that maybe potential employment opportunities for graduates of the programme.

Master of Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

Post Graduate Diploma in Science in Sports and Exercise Nutrition

Conditions

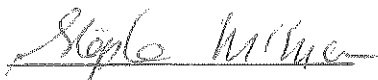
1. The programme team need to make the programme aim and objectives programme specific. In their current form they are too generic.
2. The programme team need to ensure the programme learning outcomes align to the science standards at level 9 and the module learning outcomes.
3. The programme learning outcomes need to be explicit in relation to the competencies, knowledge and skills the student should have on programme completion.
4. The programme team need to examine the learning outcomes at modular level to ensure they are NQF level 9 and measurable.
5. The assessment strategy needs to be programme specific and detailed, giving an overview of the range of assessments, conduction of assessments etc.
6. The Programme delivery strategy needs to be programme specific and comprehensive dealing with all issues related to online delivery such as software, VLE platform, student supports, teaching & learning strategies, student inputs etc.
7. The staffing requirements for programme delivery should be explicit including a timetable for appointments and evidence of the Institutes commitment to same.
8. Module level descriptors need to be at level 9 and measurable.

Recommendations

1. The Department need to develop a coherent research strategy to inform the areas they wish to consolidate and/ or develop expertise and inform future recruitment.

- and be explicit for supervisors and students.
3. The programme team need to make explicit to applicants the situation regarding accreditation with relevant bodies.
 4. The learning outcomes of the statistics module should be aligned to the programme outcomes in terms of the degree of statistical literacy required of the student.
 5. The programme team need to consider the comments of the panel in relation to individual modules content/assessment.
 6. The programme team need to include in their documentation a list of jobs that maybe potential employment opportunities for graduates of the programme.

Signed on behalf of programme validation panel



Mr Stephen Mc Manus
Chairperson



Dr Michele Glacken
Recording Secretary

Date: 27/03/19

Date: 27.3.19