

Report of Validation Panel

Date of Meeting: 16 May 2011

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| Named Award: | Master of Arts |
| Programme Title: | Master of Arts in Integrative Psychotherapy |
| Award Type: | Masters Degree |
| Award Class: | Major |
| NFQ Level: | 9 |
| Intakes Commencing: | September 2011 |
| ECTS/ACCS Credits: | 90 |

PANEL MEMBERS

| Name |
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| Dr Susan Aylwin, (formerly) University College Cork |
| Dr John A. Cooney, Consultant Psychiatrist, Mercy University Hospital, Cork |
| Ms Cynthia Ransley, Registered Psychotherapist, London |
| Ms Mary B. Ryan, National University of Ireland Maynooth (Chair) |
| Ms Eva Juhl, Institutional Review Facilitator, Office of the Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs, CIT |

PROPOSERS

| Name |
|---|
| Mr Damien Courtney, Head of Faculty of Business & Humanities, CIT |
| Dr Margaret Linehan, Head of School of Humanities, CIT |
| Mr Jim Walsh, Head of Department of Social & General Studies, CIT |
| Mr Gus Murray, Programme Coordinator, Department of Social & General Studies, CIT |
| Ms Helen Clancy, Lecturer, Department of Social & General Studies, CIT |
| Ms Una Coakley, Lecturer, Department of Social & General Studies, CIT |

IN ATTENDANCE

| Name |
|---|
| Ms Gina O'Brien, Senior Administrator, Faculty of Business & Humanities, CIT |
| Mr Ian O'Sullivan, Module Moderator, Office of the Registrar & Vice-President for Academic Affairs, CIT |

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME

This taught Master of Arts programme is proposed by the Department of Social & General Studies in the Faculty of Business & Humanities.

The programme has been developed to provide a progression route from the existing Bachelor (Honours) in Counselling & Psychotherapy. It also aims to anticipate the impending introduction of a Masters qualification as a baseline requirement for statutory registration of psychotherapists in Ireland. All modules have been newly developed for delivery in the context of this programme.

PANEL FINDINGS

1. General Findings

*NOTE: In this report, the term “Requirement” is used to indicate an action or amendment which in the view of the Panel **must** be undertaken prior to commencement of the Programme. The term “Recommendation” indicates an item to which the Institute/Academic Council/Course Board should give serious consideration for implementation at an early stage and which should be the subject of on-going monitoring.*

The Panel thanks the programme team for their openness in engaging in a constructive and challenging discussion on the proposed programme. Underpinning the discussion is a shared commitment to the provision of a new programme that seeks to make a substantial contribution to the discipline of psychotherapy in Ireland and to provide a unique learning opportunity for practitioners to develop and deepen their therapeutic knowledge and practice. The Panel would like to acknowledge the work and commitment of the programme team and recognises their pioneering work in the development of training and education in psychotherapy in Ireland.

With regard to the programme documentation, the Panel notes that, while the bulk of the materials were submitted well in advance of the panel meeting, an updated draft of the *Reflective Practitioning Dissertation* module was presented to the Panel on the day of the meeting itself.

The Panel has considered the programme as presented to it in the programme documentation and discussion with the proposers, and this report presents the Panel’s findings, **8** requirements and **2** recommendations.

The Panel offers these findings, requirements and recommendations in the hope that they will guide and support the programme team to develop the programme to the highest standard and to foster a unique and creative learning community that seeks to develop new knowledge.

2. Validation Criteria

The Panel has considered the documentation provided and has discussed the programme with the proposers. The Panel has concluded that the programme meets the required standards in the field of study at Level 9 of the National Framework.

With regard to the CIT Validation Criteria:

2.1 Is there a convincing need for the programme with a viable level of applications?

YES. The programme team envisages an intake of 20 students per annum. There are ca. 200 graduates of the existing Level 8 Honours Bachelor programme to date. A statement of support for the proposed programme has been received from the CIT Counselling & Psychotherapy Graduates’ Association.

The Panel’s findings with regard to the alignment of the programme with the emerging professional registration requirements are included under Section 2.4 hereunder.

2.2 Are the level and type of the proposed award appropriate?

YES. The Programme Outcomes and module learning outcomes are appropriate for a Level 9 Masters degree.

2.3 Is the learning experience of an appropriate level, standard and quality?

YES, WITH QUALIFICATIONS. The Panel considers that the programme as presented is too condensed, and that the amount of learning to be integrated and the personal processes to be achieved exceed what can reasonably be expected from the students within a 12-month part-time programme.

Requirement 1: The Panel requires that the programme delivery period be extended from the present one-year delivery model. The Panel recommends a two-year part-time model, but is open to alternative proposals.

Observations concerning the learning experience in individual modules are included in Section 4. below.

2.4 Is the programme structure logical and well designed (including procedures for access, transfer and progression)?

YES, WITH QUALIFICATIONS. The Panel notes that the entry requirements and admission procedures have not been stated in the programme documentation. In discussion, the proposers outlined that the admission process envisaged will encompass a portfolio of professional experience, an interview and an assessment of readiness.

The alignment of the programme with the emerging professional registration requirements was also discussed during the panel meeting. The Panel completely recognises that there is currently a lack of clarity on registration requirements, but its members are keen to ensure that potential students are fully briefed on what the programme entitles them to do on graduation.

Requirement 2: The Panel therefore requires clarification both on the precise entry requirements (honours degree), specifically on the meaning of 'equivalent', and on the exact entitlements of graduates on exit. In the context of the former, appropriate reference should be made to the Institute's RPL policy and mechanisms.

Panel findings on Semester Schedules and module sequencing are included in Section 3. Programme Structure below.

2.5 Are the programme management structures adequate?

YES. A Programme Board will operate in line with the Institute's Academic Quality System, and will have student representatives.

2.6 Are the resource requirements reasonable?

YES. The Head of Faculty confirmed that the Institute had committed to resourcing delivery of the proposed Masters. The Panel notes that there is a sufficient pool of suitably qualified staff within the Institute to deliver the programme.

Recommendation 1: To support the research aspects of the programme in particular, the Panel asks the department to ensure that the library has a comprehensive range of the required texts and access to all the appropriate electronic journals and e-learning materials.

2.7 Will the impact of the programme on the Institute be positive?

YES. The Panel heard that demand for this programme had come mainly from CIT Level 8 graduates who wished to progress to Level 9. Acknowledgement of and support for the programme had also been expressed from within the professional field. The proposers also confirmed the alignment of the programme with CIT and Faculty mission and strategy. This was noted by the Panel.

3. Programme Structure

The Panel notes that the programme structure had already been the subject of external peer evaluation at an earlier QA stage.

In exercising its brief to consider the overall structure of the programme, the Panel wishes to add the following observations:

3.1 Overlap between Modules

The Panel considers that a number of modules across both semesters are not sufficiently distinct and show considerable overlap in their overall focus and content. In particular, this expresses itself in a repetition and duplication of several elements of the Description, Learning Outcomes and Indicative Content.

Requirement 3: The Panel requires that the modules be revised in order to achieve a clear focus within and distinction between the individual modules, as well as a clear sense of progression within each thematic stream (conceptual/theoretical; clinical; experiential/personal process) between semesters.

To achieve this, the Panel recommends that, where pedagogically appropriate and in keeping with the integrative spirit of the programme, certain modules should be combined into 10 credit modules. Examples where this might be appropriate might be:

- o *Personal Process Integration 5.1 and Relational Psychotherapy (Sem. 1)*

o *Advanced Practitioner Development and Clinical Assessment* (Sem. 1)

In making this recommendation, the Panel recognises that the standard credit value for a CIT module is 5 credits. In keeping with Institute policy, module amalgamation should be considered only in those exceptional cases where this represents the most reasonable and meaningful solution to the issues noted.

3.2 Research

At the request of the Panel, the Head of School outlined the main revisions to the *Reflective Practitioning Dissertation* module.

The Panel heard that the revisions mainly served to make explicit the research components of the module. The Panel commended this, and observed that strengthening the research element would also strengthen the distinctive Masters profile of the programme (as opposed to other Level 9 offerings). However, the Panel considers that the students will require additional grounding in relevant research methodologies.

Requirement 4: The Panel asks that research approaches and methods appropriate to the philosophy of the programme should be taught formally. In this context, the Panel encourages the programme team to explore whether an appropriate research methodology module with a focus on qualitative research has already been approved for use in the context of existing programmes offered by other departments. Should the proposers decide to cover research methodologies within *Reflective Practitioning Dissertation* rather than in a dedicated separate module, it needs to be ensured that the reading list is updated accordingly.

3.3 Assessment

The Panel noted several issues related to assessment, including a tendency towards over-assessment, a massing of assessments at semester end, and a lack of clarity as to the exact nature, format and length/extensiveness of the assessments.

Requirement 5: The Panel requires the proposers to establish greater clarity on the assessment process, by specifying the format, indicative content and length of each assessment event. An overall assessment timetable should be produced and made available to the students. The Panel notes that the recommended revisions of the module structure (see 3.1) may support the proposers in streamlining the assessments.

3.4 Indicative Timetable and Delivery Format

Following on from the last point, the Panel also observed that the actual delivery structure and timetable do not emerge sufficiently clearly from the programme documentation presented.

Requirement 6: The Panel asks that an indicative timetable structure and delivery format should be produced and made available to the students as part of the programme literature.

4. Modules

The Panel notes that the new draft modules have been the subject of internal and external scrutiny by the CIT Module Moderator and external reviewers.

In exercising its brief to consider the overall standard and appropriateness of modules, the Panel wishes to add the following observations:

4.1 Various Modules: Required and Supplementary Resources

Requirement 7: The Panel asks that the reading lists for the modules have a more focused number of core texts (required reading) and specific further (supplementary) reading.

4.2 Various Modules: Integration of Psychotherapeutic and Psychiatric Mental Health Approaches

The Panel welcomes the commitment of the programme team to establish psychotherapeutic interventions across the spectrum of mental health disorders.

Recommendation 2: In this context, the Panel recommends that the programme team should consult and be guided by the national policy document *A Vision for Change* (Department of Health and Children, 2006) and its recommendations for a multidisciplinary community-based care delivery.

4.3 Module: *Reflective Practitioning Dissertation*

Requirement 8: As the revisions to the *Reflective Practitioning Dissertation* module have not been seen by the Panel or the CIT Module Moderator prior to the panel meeting, the Panel asks the proposers to submit the revised module descriptor for module moderation at the earliest opportunity.

5. Conclusions

The Panel is confident that, given a determined effort to address the requirements and recommendations set out above, a revised version of the proposed MA in Integrative Psychotherapy can be recommended to the Academic Council of Cork Institute of Technology for validation in the near future.

Given the significant nature of some of the revisions required, the Panel however wishes to receive the completed draft of the revised programme, highlighting the differences, prior to issuing a recommendation for validation.

The Panel asks that the revised draft should be produced and submitted to the Panel members as soon as possible, but no later than October 2011, thus enabling the validation review to be completed by December 2011. This would allow the proposers to contemplate a January 2012 start-up, should a start-up in September 2011 as originally envisaged not prove feasible.