

Ms Jan Cairns,
Quality Assurance Officer
Technological University Dublin
5th Floor, Park House, Grangeegorman
191 North Circular Road
Dublin D07 EWV4

6th June 2022

Re: Review of TU835 BSc (Hons) in Spatial Planning and Environmental Management – Response to Validation Report

Dear Jan,

We acknowledge receipt of the Report of the Programme Validation Panel detailing the output of the Panel for the *TU835 BSc (Hons) in Spatial Planning and Environmental Management*, submitted for Review by the School of Transport Engineering, Environment and Planning.

The Programme Management Team welcome the detailed comments from the Review Panel. We have considered the conditions, recommendations and observations and have addressed them together with the Programme Team.

Our responses to the validation report are included in this letter along with additional appendicised documentation* for consideration by the Panel and the Academic Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee (AQAE).

Conditions

1. The Programme Team needs to have in place a schedule/calendar of assessments. This will enable students to see at a glance how many assessments they must complete and the timings/deadlines for these. It will also assist the Team in planning module assessments. The schedule should also indicate when students should expect to receive feedback on their assessment, to ensure that this is provided in a timely manner.

*Response: A **Schedule / Calendar of Assessments** has been prepared in response to this Condition (see Appendix A within the Response to TU835 Validation Panel [linked folder](#)), which will be used to communicate assessment deadlines to students. Module Co-ordinators will be invited to populate assessment deadlines and intended feedback dates at the outset of each semester. The Programme Management Team note that the “DIT Student Charter” includes a*

commitment to provide feedback on assignments “within 4 weeks unless there is a good reason for this not to be possible” and will endeavour to meet this expectation.

2. The Programme Team should demonstrate how the programme learning outcomes align to the modules. This may require an enhancement of programme and module learning outcomes.

*Response: A **Programme and Module Learning Outcomes Matrix** has been prepared in response to this Condition (see Appendix B within the [linked folder](#)).*

The Programme Management Team are satisfied, having undertaken this very worthwhile exercise, that all Programme Learning Outcomes are addressed at least once within each Stage of the programme. There is also a good balance, distribution and progression of learning throughout the Programme and its constituent stages, in terms of achieving these over-arching programme-level outcomes.

Recommendations

1. The Panel considers the programme to be very strong in terms of its programme content and demand in relevant sectors for its graduates. It commends the various initiatives that the Programme Team has put in place to attract more applicants. However, given the intention to increase student numbers in the programme to make it sustainable, the Panel considers that the Team should give further consideration to a marketing plan for the programme. While the Team is using the programme website for the promotion of the programme, the Panel asks the Team to consider how potential students are directed towards this website. In addition, the Panel recommends that in the overall marketing plan for the programme there is nationwide outreach. It suggests that the Team looks to develop material such as social media videos with a strong student input and focus on student activities. It encourages the Team to review its target audience to address the current gender imbalance and to utilise the existing STEM outreach in this regard.

*Response: A **TU835 Marketing Strategy 2022-23** has been prepared in response to this Recommendation (see Appendix C within the Response to TU835 Validation Panel [linked folder](#)). The Marketing Strategy will be implemented and updated by the Programme Management Team on an annual basis.*

The Programme Management Team will continue to develop the programme web infrastructure, including the [programme webpage](#) and micro-site [programme information page](#) and to ensure that there is a clear and user-friendly link between these resources. This will be critically important within the context of the new School structure (as part of the TU Dublin Organisational Design) and a sub-committee of the School Design Team has been convened with managerial representation from the Environment & Planning discipline.

The Marketing Strategy includes continuation of regular careers portal bulletins about the programme, which will direct potential students to the programme webpage and School micro-site.

The Marketing Strategy will be implemented in parallel with the Pathways for Geographers initiative, which will be piloted with a number of key partner schools during semester 1 of 2022-23. All outreach activity will prioritise, as far as practical, girls and co-educational schools and efforts will be made to make promotional material accessible to all genders.

The Programme Management Team has engaged with a video-making supplier and, in response to the Validation Panel Feedback, the School has committed to making a high-quality video clip that can be used to promote the programme on social media, etc. It is intended the video will be available for use during the 2022-23 CAO campaign, which commences in November 2022.

2. The Panel recommends that to support and reflect internationalisation the programme documentation including modules should highlight where relevant the influence of global challenges, policy and practice, such as the global carbon balance.

Response: Following the advice of the Review Panel, the Programme Team conducted an audit of all modules and have made a number of changes to increase and make more apparent the emphasis on internationalisation within the programme, including the examination of global challenges such as the global carbon balance.

On foot of this recommendation, a number of practical amendments have been made to the following modules: SSPL1008; SSPL2030; SSPL2032; SSPL2033; SSPL3017; SSPL3021. For example, SSPL3017 Planning Theories and the Future now contains a Learning Outcome to “Think critically about the relationship between planning, democracy, economy and environment in addressing societal challenges and wicked problems in order to plan for a sustainable, equitable future”. As another example, SSPL2032 River Basins and Hydrology has had its Indicative Syllabus reviewed to include “The policies and practice of river management with climate change”.

3. The Panel understands that climate change and related issues and challenges are embedded throughout all modules. It recommends that as sustainable development is a key theme of the programme this is made more explicit within modules and also in promotional material.

Response: Following the advice of the Review Panel, the Programme Team conducted an audit of all modules and have made a number of changes to increase and make more apparent the emphasis on sustainable development within the programme.

On foot of this recommendation, a number of practical amendments have been made to the following modules: SSPL1008; SSPL1019; SSPL20XX; SSPL2022; SSPL2028; SSPL2032; SSPL2033; SSPL2035; SSPL3017; SSPL3021; SSPL4017. For example, on foot of the discussion emanating from this Recommendation, SSPL20XX Waste Management Project has been renamed as

SSPL20XX Sustainable Waste Management; also SSPL4017 Environmental Auditing has been renamed as SSPL4017 Eco Management and Auditing.

This increased prominence on sustainable development will be followed through in the preparation of promotional material as part of the Marketing Strategy and the Pathways for Geographers outreach campaign.

4. The Panel notes that students are encouraged to challenge current systems and policies from the outset of the programme. The Panel recommends that this be more visible within the modules.

Response: The Programme Management Team are mindful that (i) the students are at an early stage in their studies, and (ii) the students are challenged inherently within and throughout the curriculum. However, the Stage One Programme Team have collectively reviewed the syllabus and have made appropriate amendments to modules, such as SSPL1020 Society and Environment, SSPL1008 Introduction to Spatial Planning and SSPL1019 Ecology, in order to make and present such challenges to prevailing systems and policies more explicitly.

5. The Panel acknowledges that the Programme Team has reviewed the assessment of the dissertation and that the assessment for this 25 ECTS module now has a 100% weighting on the final dissertation. The Panel recommends that the Programme Team reconsider this to ensure that work completed, as well as dissemination opportunities, in addition to the final dissertation, is recognised and contributes to the overall module mark.

Response: The Programme Management Team will review the operation of this module within a year of the Review and consider potential changes to the module weighting, and other possible innovations, to ensure appropriate recognition of work-in-progress.

6. The Spatial Planning stream (in particular 2nd and 3rd year) should be reviewed in order to rebalance the workload more evenly between semesters one and two.

Response: The Programme Management Team recognises current workload issues in the spatial planning stage 2 (SP2) and stage 3 (SP3) streams. These have been addressed by curriculum changes within the proposed Review documentation.

In SP2: SSPL2021 Residential Layout Project and SSPL2023 Project 2d – Urban Audit have been merged into a single year-long 10-credit module (“SSPL2021 Urban Layout Design and Analysis”). The number of major projects in this stage is reduced from 3 to 2.

In SP3: SSPL3014 Local Area Plan has been moved to stage 4 (and retitled as “SSPL40XX Local Plan-making” to form part of the Final Year Integrated Planning Studio and replace SSPL4024 Masterplanning). The number of major projects in this stage is reduced from 3 to 2.

Particular reference is made to the newly introduced Design Skills Lab Programme which introduces increased continuity of learning within each stage of the spatial planning stream and throughout the programme.

7. The Programme Team should reconsider where there are modules assessed entirely by one final written examination. Similarly, where the module assessment is stated as being 100% continuous assessment, it seems that in reality this is broken down into separate assessments. This should be clarified within the module descriptors. The Panel also notes that this breakdown will be required within the Programme & Module Catalogue.

*Response: A **Schedule / Calendar of Assessments** has been provided has been prepared in response to Condition 1 above (see Appendix A within the Response to TU835 Validation Panel [linked folder](#)). This requires Module Co-ordinators to include reference to additional briefing information or project briefs.*

The Programme Management Team wishes to note that since project briefs can vary significantly from year-to-year, the most appropriate mechanism for communicating details of assessment breakdowns is often within (i) the project brief itself and (ii) the Schedule / Calendar, as opposed to module descriptors which are mainly for QA purposes.

8. The Panel supports the School in seeking to increase the number of full and/or part-time lecturing staff and to reduce the programme's reliance on HPALs, while maintaining the significant input of industry practitioners in the delivery of the programme through the guest lecturer programme.

Response: The Programme Management Team will continue to advocate for appropriate investment in academic resources and to reduce the programme's reliance on HPALs. The Team will also continue to facilitate appropriate input of industry practitioners in the delivery of the programme through the guest lecturer programme.

9. The Panel concurs with the Programme Team that staffing resources are important for the support of the field trips and for the management and administration of the work placement, and it supports the School in seeking to address this through the Organisation Design.

Response: The Programme Management Team is grateful for acknowledgement of the high academic and administrative workload associated with managing the work placement programme, which needs to be assessed and resourced.

The Programme Management Team will continue to advocate for appropriate resource support for managing and administering the work placement programme, through the Organisational Design and other channels, including the College Quality Action Plan.

10. The Panel supports the School in exploring avenues to support students to attend Field Trip (Courses) where financial support is needed.

Response: The Programme Management Team will continue to explore avenues to support student attendance on curricular field trips where financial support is needed.

11. The Panel recommends that the Programme Team explore interactions with other HEIs delivering similar programmes to share resources, to support field courses for example.

Response: The Programme Management Team will, as suggested, explore potential interactions with other HEIs delivering similar programmes, in order to share resources, support field trips and to support other potential academic and co-curricular collaborations.

The Programme Management Team is especially grateful for the suggestion of a very welcome potential co-collaborator.

12. The Panel understands the circumstances around professional accreditation of the Environmental Management stream and recommends that this is revisited periodically by the Team in case this situation changes. The Panel is cognisant that the School has links with a number of professional bodies and associations and encourages students to engage with these.

Response: The Programme Management Team is open to considering any suitable options for accreditation that might arise in the future. We will continue to encourage our students to join professional bodies, as well as clubs and societies such as the Dublin Naturalists' Field Club and the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.

13. The Panel recommends that students on the programme should be provided with access to an Environmental Management lab that is adequately resourced and equipped and with appropriate technical support.

Response: The Programme Management Team is particularly grateful to the Panel for supporting the important needs of Environmental Management students for access to a lab that is adequately resourced and equipped and with appropriate technical support.

The Programme Management Team will continue to advocate strongly for an adequately resourced Environmental Management lab with appropriate technical support.

14. The programme documentation should be reviewed, proofread and updated, and there is a consistent style and balance of content within modules. Reading lists need to be more current and to remove reference to old websites.

Response: The Programme Management Team recognise that a small number of modules are currently presented in prior module templates. All modules will be transitioned into the Akari

Programme Module Catalogue by latest within semester 1 of AY2022-23, ensuring a standardised format across all modules in addition to ensuring full compliance with QA module administration procedures.

Following the advice of the Review Panel, the Programme Management Team conducted an audit of all reading lists and the following module Reading Lists have been reviewed and updated: SSPL1014; SSPL1016; SSPL1019; SSPL1020; SSPL2022; SSPL2028; SSPL2032; SSPL2033; SSPL2035; SSPL2037; SSPL2038; SSPL3013; SSPL3017; SSPL3021; SSPL3023; SSPL3027; SSPL3035; SSPL3029; SSPL3036; SSPL4009; SSPL4017; SSPL4019; SSPL4021; SSPL4022.

15. The Team should review again the balance of contact hours and self-directed learning across all modules.

Response: The Assistant Head of School will carry out a detailed review of the balance of contact hours and self-directed learning across all modules as part of the new programme implementation. Any identified issues will be discussed together with the respective Module Co-ordinator and Programme Co-Chairpersons. The Programme Management Team will additionally review the balance of contact hours and self-directed learning across all modules within a year of the Review.

16. The Field Trip modules should be renamed Field Courses/Excursions, depending on the length.

Response: The Programme Management Team have carefully considered this recommendation and are conscious of operational commitments under TU Dublin Health & Safety Policies, which have defined nomenclature, and of the need to fulfil the requirements of Insurance certification for all off-site curricular activity.

Observation

1. The Panel notes that the Programme Team does not intend to offer exit awards for student who leave the programme having completed over 120 or 180 ECTS and the rationale for this decision. The Panel's view is that while such awards may not facilitate student progression into careers in planning and environmental management, they will provide recognition of the learning completed by the student which may facilitate entry into other careers or programmes of education.

Response: The Programme Management Team have carefully considered this observation and are conscious of the fully-formed academically integral nature of the programme. The streamed nature of the programme is also a relevant consideration, as students completing the second and third stages of the programme have only completed 60 and 120 credits of specialised learning respectively. The Team will continue to consider this observation and discuss with its stakeholders and professional accreditation partners, particularly in the context of potential career pathways and avenues of progression for students. The Team will also continue to

consider this observation in the context of future programme development including, for example, development of earn'n'learn-type models of delivery.

We are very grateful for the work and insight of the Review Panel. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members for their commitment and valuable perspectives throughout this process.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Conor Norton

Head of School of Transport Engineering, Environment and Planning

APPENDIX A: Schedule / Calendar of Assessments

APPENDIX B: Programme and Module Learning Outcomes Matrix

APPENDIX C: TU835 Marketing Strategy 2022-23

[* note: all Appendices are available within the *Response to TU835 Validation Panel* [linked folder](#)]