OLLSCOIL TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA
BHAILE ÁTHA CLIATH

T**U**BLIN

TECHNOLOGICAL
UNIVERSITY DUBLIN

SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES

NEW PROGRAMME VALIDATION REPORT

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care (Programme TU993)

Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education and Care (Programme TU790)

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care (Programme TU990 *Add-on to Programme TU790*)

Technological University Dublin,

Blanchardstown Campus,

Blanchardstown Road North, Dublin 15,

D15 YV78　|　http://www.tudublin.ie/

VALIDATION PANEL DATE: February 2, 2021

Introduction

Ireland's first Technological University, The Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin), was designated on January 1, 2019. With three campuses located at Grangegorman, Blanchardstown and Tallaght, TU Dublin's programmes are underpinned by inclusive and open learning experience, offering pathways to education and training from Level 6 (Apprenticeships/Higher Certificate) to Level 10 (Doctorate) awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ[1]). Technological University Dublin is a Designated Awarding Body, with the authority in law to make awards under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education & Training) Act 2012[2]. The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the Peer Review panel that was convened to validate the *Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care* (including the embedded awards), against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated in the University's Policy Document 2MP01[3].

Programme Overview

The proposed programmes in *Early Childhood Education and Care* reflect the changing context and progressive development of the Early Learning and Care sector in Ireland. The programmes arise from response to the changing landscape envisioned by the Department of Education and Skills (DoES) and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (formerly the Department of Children and Youth Affairs), and the DoES requirement for the recognition of Initial Professional Education programmes. It is TU Dublin's intent to evolve and advance in support of its stakeholders and communities, and to be truly relevant and capable of delivering real impact. The university is also responding to changing structural and regulatory factors that impact on the ability of its graduates to progress to rewarding careers and opportunities through further education. They also consider the development professional award standards and criteria in early childhood education and care.

The background and context for the award criteria and guidelines are dynamic, hence, demand for enhanced staff qualifications in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings. The contribution of initial professional education programmes is critical in ensuring that early childhood education and care settings for children in Ireland are of the highest quality thereby increasing the likelihood that children's experiences of these settings will positively contribute to their learning, wellbeing and development. The objective of the Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines is to ensure that all awards offered in Ireland as IPE for Early Childhood Educators will have the capacity to prepare graduates for the increasingly complex and challenging roles. The proposed programmes in Early Childhood Education and Care are a response to this changing landscape, the publication of the PACG and the invitation of the Department of Education and Skills to education providers to submit programmes designed to meet these criteria and guidelines for recognition as professional programmes.

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[1] QQI. 2018. National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)

[2] Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, [No. 28]. 81 pp.

[3] 2MP01 Design, Validation and Accreditation of New Academic Programmes

Validation Panel Composition

Chair: Prof. Emer Ring
                          Dean of Education
                          Mary Immaculate College (MIC), Limerick

Member(s): *Academic*

                          Mr Donnacha McNamara
                          Head of Faculty of Business and Humanities
                          Limerick Institute of Technology

                          Mr Gerard O'Carroll
                          Lecturer in Early Years
                          Munster Technological University

Member(s): *Business/Industry*

                          Ms Michelle Hart
                          Siolta Manager/Early Education Advisor
                          National Childhood Network

In attendance:

                          Dr Larry McNutt, Registrar, TU Dublin Blanchardstown Campus

                          Dr Philip Owende, Academic Quality Manager, TU Dublin Blanchardstown Campus
                          (Panel Secretary)

Date of Panel Meeting: February 2, 2021.

Consultation

Management Team consulted during the panel meeting:

Dr Pat O'Connor	Head of School of Humanities, Blanchardstown Campus
Dr Lavinia McLean	Head of Department of Humanities, Blanchardstown Campus
Dr Damien Roche	Head of School of Business & Humanities, Tallaght Campus
Helena Doody	Head of Department of Humanities, Tallaght Campus

Academic staff contributing to programme development and consulted during the panel meeting:

Dr Ruth Harris	Senior Lecturer in Humanities
Martina Coombes	Senior Lecturer in Humanities
Dr Margaret O'Donoghue	Lecturer in Humanities
Deirdre McGrath	Lecturer in Humanities
Joanne McHale	Lecturer in Humanities/ECEC
Michael Noonan	Lecturer in Humanities
Dr Bozena Dubiel	Assistant Lecturer in Humanities
Dr Clay Darcy	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities/ECEC
Dr Julie WingetPower	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities/ECEC
Garreth Smith	Assistant Lecturer in Humanities
Colette Murray	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities/ECEC
Chris O'Ralaigh	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities
Aileen O'Reilly	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities/ECEC
Mary Roche	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities/ECEC
Nigel Vahey	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities
Rebecca Penco	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities
Jody Garry	Assistance Lecturer in Humanities

The programme development process has been supported by the following Heads of Function:

Dr Larry McNutt	Registrar, TU Dublin Blanchardstown Campus
Dr Philip Owende	Academic Quality Manager, Blanchardstown Campus

Validation Panel Findings

In evaluating the appropriateness, quality and proposed operation of this programme the following criteria were considered and are hereby reported upon:

Strategic planning

The submission outline TU Dublin Strategic Intent (see Appendix 1 of Programme Submission Document). The panel was satisfied that the programme and the design are in keeping with the university's mission and will contribute to key Strategic Objectives outlined in Strategic Intent to 2030. These are such as, Teaching and Learning and Student Experience, Graduate Employability, Research, Engagement, TU Criteria, and Internationalisation.

Evidence of consultation

The programme development process sought for and considered inputs from: academic staff involved in the delivery of Early Childhood Education and Care programmes; learner representatives, and; potential employers and practitioners. Consultation was also held with the coordinators of partner programmes in social care in TU Dublin. Through the structured discussions with the Programme Team during the validation sessions, the panel established evidence that comprehensive research/consultation efforts had been undertaken with both internal and external stakeholders, to validate the rationale and the adopted structure, entry criteria, pathways and characteristics of the proposed programme.

The panel commends the evident student-focused nature of the programmes – partnership approach with key stakeholders in building the programme. Also, from the panel discussion, it was clear that there is a commitment to partnership with stakeholders. The panel deems it useful to reference this as an element of the rationale for programme development, and also capture the extensive work that has, and continues to be done by the programme team in this area.

Graduate employment potential

The rapid growth in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector has seen an expansion of the workforce and an increase in the level of qualifications of staff working in Early Childhood Education and Care settings. The panel was of the opinion that there are a wide range of career opportunities for graduates and based on core knowledge and competence outcomes of the proposed programme, such graduates would be of immediate value to the Early Childhood Education and Care sector.

Protection of enrolled learners

Part 6 Section 65(1) of the Act[4] does not apply to TU Dublin.

Provisions for quality assurance

The panel was provided with the university policy document covering *Design, Validation and Accreditation of New Academic Courses* (2MP01) and the programmes' *Placement Policy* document. The validation document also outlined the rationale and how the programme submission had been proposed, developed and approved internally, in compliance with the university's quality assurance policies and procedures (Validation Document Section 6 and Section 7). The panel noted that the university's policies and procedures for programme development, monitoring and continuous improvement complied with its guidelines.

The panel commended the programme team for the clarity, organisation and depth of the documentation received for the validation exercise.

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[4] Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

Programme title and award title
The panel was satisfied that the title of the proposed programme is clear, accurately reflects the coverage, and therefore will be able to accurately inform prospective learners and other stakeholders.

Ethics
Underpinning the programme and embedded across the modules is a recognition of the importance of policy and practice frameworks within the early childhood education and care field. These include coverage of (among others) the *Code of Professional Responsibilities and Code of Ethics for Early Years Educators*. Also, the panel was satisfied that the university has internal policies and procedures in place to ensure appropriate ethical oversight in respect of teaching, learning, and research activity across all programmes at the designated NFQ levels of the programmes presented for this validation.

Consistency
The panel found evidence of progression in proposed modules from Semester 1 through Semester 8. Therefore, the panel was content with expectation in progressive development of the learners' standards of knowledge, skill and competence throughout the individual modules and the integrated programme outcomes. The panel also noted that (among others): each of the four placement modules has specific focus; there was comprehensive planning and supports for students' placement, and programmes covered niche areas of multilingualism – second language pedagogy and risky play.

For programme enhancement, the panel considered the need to develop:
- Framework for the delivery of the programme across TU Dublin's three campuses in order to address the challenges this may present in terms of consistency. A graphic representation of framework would be a useful aid the description.
- Graduate Profile for the Level 7 and Level 8 to demonstrate inherent similarities and differences – e.g., to identify a focus for the Level 8 perhaps, Leadership or Research.

Teaching and learning
The panel discussed with the programme development team about the range of interactions used with learners in the course of programmes delivery. The panel observed clear evidence of structured interactions with learners and comprehensive academic and technical support arrangements for learning. Evidence of commitment to learner needs were articulated in both the validation documents and in the ensuing panel discussion with programme team, including (but not limited to): applications of a range of teaching and assessment methods/styles; well-developed placement policy; formative teaching and learning resources such as course handbooks; adherence to timely feedback on assignments, and; appropriate course management strategies.

The panel noted the following commendable aspects of the programme planning and delivery:
- Strong variety of modules addressing key domains in Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Strong evidence of research-active staff and a commitment to the value of contributing to research in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Strength in social policy area in keeping with First Five
- Modules on leadership and mentoring constitute a positive contribution in preparation for the workplace. Expectations of being a Change Leader/Agent, Researcher, and building relationships with parents in addition to pedagogical domains.
- Age-spread is constructively addressed, extending from years 0-12 in notable cases.

Learner assessment
The learner assessment strategies within each module in the programme schedule are to be conducted in accordance with TU Dublin assessment policies and procedure, covering Continuous Assessment, Summative

Examinations and assessment in placement and work-based environments. These are conducted per the Academic programme assessment policy and procedure (3AS06).

Through discussion with the programme design team, the multiple modes of assessment to be employed were articulated. Specifically, the programme team was conscious of the challenges to capturing learning outcomes through a variety of means and ensuring all learners have an opportunity to display their learning.

The panel recommends that:
- The programme team to revisit the submission document and Module Descriptors (Book of Modules) with a view to ensuring alignment of expected Learning Outcomes with the assessment strategies adopted in all modules.
- The programme team provide exemplars of types of continuous assessment under Assessment Description tab for each module contents in the Programme Management Catalogue (AKARI).

Standards of knowledge, skill and competence
Having reviewed the syllabi and assessment methods as proposed, the panel was of the opinion that learners would be capable of attaining the standards of knowledge, skill and competences relevant for the award of *BA (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care* and the embedded awards and including the one year 60 ECTS Credits add-on programme offering. The panel commends the incorporation into the programme of niche areas of multilingualism – second language pedagogy and risky play.

The panel recommends that the Programme Team:
- Consider extending the suite of electives to include practice-based modules across the programme based on students' identified interests with a view to enhancing students' employability and harnessing students' motivation.
- Explore pathways to embed *Internationalisation* further in the programme.

Access, transfer and progression
The panel confirmed that the programme incorporates appropriate procedures for management of access, transfer and progression. These are provided for per the University's Policy *3AD08 Admissions Policy*. The programmes clearly set out the minimum entry requirements through the CAO process and also considers a mature student entry route with integrated assessment of learner suitability to succeed in programmes.

As the programme is a response to the Department of Education and Skills Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PAGC), learners at various stages of the programmes considered should be able to transfer to similar programmes. An overarching objective of the PACG is in the improvement of experiences and outcomes of young children. There was clear evidence of progression from Semester 1 through Semester 8.

Graduate from the NFQ Level 7 programme may progress to the NFQ Level 8 add-on programme in TU Dublin or may opt to transfer to other education providers. Graduates of the NFQ Level 8 programme may continue studies on Taught Masters programme such as the MA in Child, Family and Community Studies in TU Dublin or similar programmes in other providers in Ireland or abroad. Graduates may also progress to research programmes at masters or doctoral level.

Other salient considerations
- On Assessment Strategy:
  (a) The panel noted the practice orientation of key modules in the programmes and also the deliberate foci on practice elements in the delivery, e.g., the use of ECE specialist rooms equipped with artefacts for practice settings. Also, there was art and creativity room as well and a variety of practical demonstrations to ensure that students learn through simulated practices. Why then have the programmes/modules still focused on Final Examination for substantive parts of assessment

strategies? Module with 50% Exam weighting does not explicit depict the experiential learning in contents and modes of engagement. Having noted the richness of in-course projects and practical work, it seems rational to aim for increased CA weighting where deserved?

(b) The programmes also need to consider Integrated Assessment, i.e., shared between different modules, to reduce number of assessments.

(c) There is need to highlight the learner support provided within programmes, particularly to assist students in the initial stages. Examples include (among others); writing support, action planning, action research, comprehension, support for collating ideas and thought and organising that as part of team?

- Inclusion seems to be handled in patchwork. A thematic approach is desirable as Inclusion is of critical importance especially for the NFQ Level 8 graduates.

- Internationalisation is not quite evident in the proposal, e.g., Study Abroad, International Projects etc. Panel highlighted that international exposure adds viable options/pathways alternatives for graduates who do not wish to continue in the sector. Possible approach also includes research links and pursuit of joint funding applications to relevant agencies could be pursued to support this route.

- The PACG has focus on community and engagement and should be further addressed by programmes.

- Reported that the School of Humanities has made submission/application for recognition of the four-year ECEC programme under PACG Guidelines on May 29, 2020 and is awaiting response from the Department of Education and Skills.

- Looked at from students' perspective; Would these courses excite me? There seems to be social policy documents embedded in modules, but realistically, policies change. Therefore, what the student needs to know and understand as Learning Outcome is not specifics of any policies, but how to interpret policy.

- Looked at from students' perspective; Is this an enjoyable course of study? In some respects, they seem too legislative and policy driven. Programme team needs to consider where to emphasise/highlight the roles of STEM. For example, prevailing learning/teaching/engagement environments necessitate serious consideration of the roles of digital creation in the curriculum, essentially defining how learners can deal with similar situation.

- Module ECHC H4032: Leadership, Management, Communication and Mentoring (Semester 8) provides scope for more in-depth handling of an area such as mentoring rather than policy. Consider LO for mentoring.

- Overall, the five New Modules as proposed are logical, but; How much was determined by external (PACG) consideration? Was student desire considered?

- Social Justice in the Early Years (Module ECHC H4028) explores multiple identities including culture, ability/disability, class, sexual orientation, gender, age, religion, language and family status. Based on our history, the programme team need to consider sectarianism as well. Is that something to think about, e.g., in relation to shared education systems?

- Student journal or e-Portfolio as currently applied may be underutilised and principles should be applied across more modules requiring syntheses of the different element of programme and reflections.

Decision of the Panel

The panel recommends validation of the following programmes with ~~Conditions~~[5]/Recommendations[6]:

Programme title:	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care
Programme code:	TU993
Award Title:	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
NFQ level:	8 (240 ECTS credits)

Programme title:	Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education and Care
Programme code:	TU790
Award Title:	Bachelor of Arts
NFQ level:	7 (180 ECTS credits)

Programme title:	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Education and Care
Programme code:	TU990
Award Title:	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
NFQ level:	8 (Add-on to TU790, 60 ECTS credits)

Conditions

None

Commendations

The panel made the following observations on the proposed programmes and the documentation assessed, and which are worthy of commendation:

(1) The clarity, organisation and depth of the documentation received for the validation exercise.

(2) Strong variety of modules addressing key domains in Early Childhood Education and Care.

(3) Strong evidence of research-active staff and a commitment to the value of contributing to research in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

(4) Evidence of progression from Semester 1 through Semester 8.

(5) Age-spread is constructively addressed, extending from years 0-12 in notable cases.

(6) Strength in social policy area in keeping with *First Five*— A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families 2019-2028.

(7) Each of the four placement modules has specific focus.

(8) Comprehensive planning and supports for students' placement.

(9) Niche areas of multilingualism – second language pedagogy and risky play.

(10) Student-focused nature of the programmes – partnership approach with key stakeholders in building the programme evident.

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[5] A condition is an action, which in the opinion of the validation panel, must be undertaken prior to the commencement of the programme. Conditions are mandatory for programme approval.

[6] A recommendation is a proposed action, which in the opinion of the validation panel, must be given serious consideration.

(11) Conscious of challenges of capturing learning outcomes through a variety of means and ensuring all learners have an opportunity to display their learning.

(12) Modules on leadership and mentoring constitute a positive contribution in preparation for the workplace. Expectations of being a Change Leader/Agent, Researcher, and building relationships with parents in addition to pedagogical domains.

Recommendations

The Programme Team to:

(1) Consider developing a framework for the delivery of the programme across TU Dublin's three campuses in order to address the challenges this may present in terms of consistency. Consider depicting the programme framework through developing a graphic that provides, *inter alia*, an overview of key domains; modules; professional practice, niche research foci and elective opportunities.

(2) Consider developing a Graduate Profile for the Level 7 and Level 8 to demonstrate similarities and differences – e.g., to identify a focus for the Level 8 perhaps, Leadership or Research.

(3) Revisit the submission document and module descriptors with a view to aligning expected learning outcomes with the assessment strategies adopted.

(4) Provide exemplars of types of continuous assessment as Appendices.

(5) Consider extending suite of electives, to include practice-based modules, across the programme based on students' identified interests with a view to enhancing students' employability and harnessing students' motivation.

(6) Explore pathways to embed *Internationalisation* further in the programme.

(7) Create a graphic to demonstration strand/theme progression across the programme from Semester 1 through Semester 8.

(8) It is clear that there is a commitment to partnership with stakeholders – it would be useful to reference this as an element of the rationale for programme development and capture the extensive work that has, and continues to be done by the programme team in this area.

Validation Report Sign-off

Chair

_____   _____

Prof. Emer Ring   Date

Secretary

_____   _____

Dr Philip Owende   Date