NEW PROGRAMME VALIDATION REPORT

Master of Arts (MA)

in

Creative Digital Media;

UX and Interaction Design

(Programme BN541)

VALIDATION PANEL DATE: May 25, 2018

Introduction

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown has the Delegated Authority from the [Quality and Qualifications Ireland](), to; develop, validate, implement and continuously improve its existing taught higher education and training programmes up to and including programmes in Level 9 of the [National Framework of Qualifications]().

The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the Peer Review panel that was established to validate this proposed programme against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated in the Institute Policy Document 2MP01[1].

Programme Overview

First popularised by Don Norman's self-selected professional title of User Experience Architect at Apple:

 "*User Experience encompasses all aspects of the end-user's interaction with the company, it's services and products.*"

The perceptions, beliefs, behaviours, feelings and interactions of users that occur before, during and after the use of a product or service are considered. By conducting user and business needs analysis, research, usability testing, data analysis, product specification and prototyping, the UX designer ensures value to the user remains undiluted throughout the service or product design life cycle.

Interaction Design focuses on the engagement of the user with a product or service at the point of contact, while considering the designs of engaging interfaces that anticipate and compliment human behaviour patterns, perception, cognition and emotive responses. With an understanding of how humans interact with technology, designers and technologists can predict how someone might interact with a system, fix problems early and approach problem-solving in new and innovate ways.

In the *National Skills Bulletin* 2015, 2016 2017, the Skills and Labour Market Research Unit (SLMRU) in SOLAS for the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs identified the demand for qualified UX and UI professionals in Ireland[2]. The *Guidance for Higher Education providers on Current and Future Skills Needs of Enterprise* report[3] is developed to provide guidance for higher education organisations in funding procurements for Springboard+ courses. It draws upon reports by the Expert Group on Future Skills Needs and consultation with industry bodies and stakeholders. The report also identifies the area of UX and User Interface Design as specific skillsets currently in demand.

The Master of Arts in Creative Digital Media (UX and Interaction Design) aims to address current industry qualification, skills and knowledge shortfalls in the ICT and creative sectors; providing students with the tools, techniques and critical framework in which to research, observe, capture, and use business and user data to innovate, design, test and iterate useful and usable solutions for digital products and services.

Learners on this MA in Creative Digital Media-UX and Interaction Design programme, will have the opportunity to take one of two pathways illustrated in Figure 1.

Programme BN541R: 30 ECTS credits of taught modules in each of semesters 1 & 2, with a 30 ECTS credit Research Project in semester 3.

Programme BN541M: 30 ECTS credits of taught modules in semester 1 with a 60 ECTS credit Research Project in semesters 2 & 3.

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[1] 2MP01 Design, Validation and Accreditation of New Academic Programmes

[2] National Skills Bulletin 2017. Available http://www.solas.ie/SolasPdfLibrary/NSB.pdf

[3] Guidance for Higher Education Providers on Current and Future Skills Needs. Available at
  http://www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/springboard_2016_guidance_for_he_providers.pdf
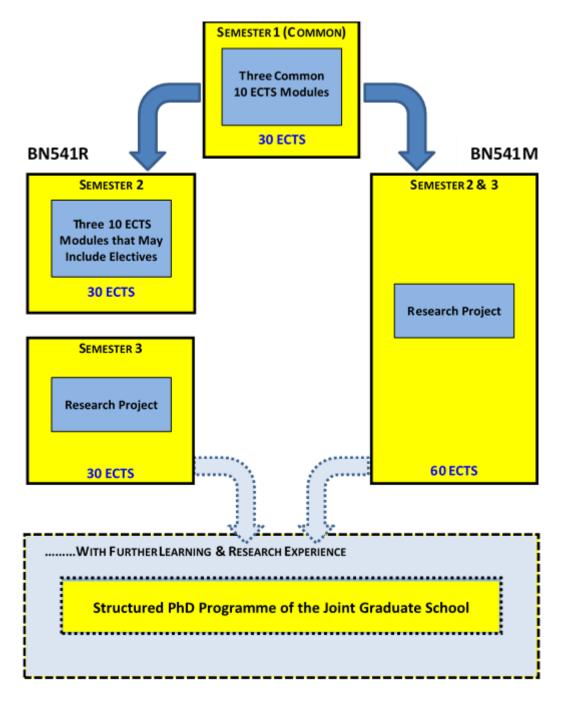
Figure 1 Pathways for the Proposed MA in Creative Digital Media-UX & Interaction Design

Validation Panel Composition

Chair: Dr Niall Seery
                         Vice President Academic Affairs & Registrar,
                         Athlone Institute of Technology.

Member(s): *Academic Experts*
                         Dr Simon Perkins
                         Faculty of Media & Communication, Bournemouth University, UK.

                         Dr Kylie Jarrett
                         Head of the Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, Maynooth University

                         Nollaig Crombie
                         Head of Department of Design & Creative Media, Letterkenny Institute of
                         Technology

Member(s): *Business/Industry Experts*
                         Robert Coyle, Head of UX at Creme Global, Dublin

                         Catherine Madden, Project Director, UXDX, Dublin

                         Niall O'Hoisin, Noho Ltd. Dublin

In attendance: Dr Larry McNutt, Registrar, IT Blanchardstown (Panel Secretary)

                         Dr Philip Owende, Academic Quality Manager, IT Blanchardstown

Date of Panel Meeting: May 25, 2018.

Consultation
Management Team consulted during the panel meeting:
Dr Anthony Keane   Head of School of Informatics & Engineering
Daniel McSweeney   Head of Department of Informatics

Academic staff contributing to programme development and consulted during the panel meeting:
Nicola Duffy   Lecturer in Creative Digital Media
Siobhan Enright   Lecturer in Creative Digital Media
Shaun Ferns   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Niamh O'Hora   Lecturer in Creative Digital Media
Hugh Rodgers   Lecturer in Creative Digital Media
Dr Matt Smith   Senior Lecturer in Informatics
Paul Stacey   Senior Lecturer in Engineering
Dr Helen Williams   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Arnold Hensman   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Margaret Kinsella   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Hugh McCabe   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Orla McMahon   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Mark Shields   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media
Robert Smith   Lecturer in Informatics and Creative Digital Media

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 panel was satisfied that the programme and the design are in keeping with the Institute's mission, do not constitute redundant provision, and consider efficient deployment of associated resources.

Evidence of consultation
The programme development process sought for and considered inputs from: academic staff involved in the delivery of creative digital media programmes; learner representatives; graduates of the supporting undergraduate programmes; potential employers, business and practitioners, and; technical staff representatives. Through the structured discussions with the management, and the programme design and delivery teams during the validation panel visit, the panel established evidence that comprehensive research/consultation efforts were undertaken with both internal and external stakeholders to validate the rationale and the adopted structure, pathways and characteristics of the proposed programme.

Graduate employment potential
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 industry.

Protection of enrolled learners
Part 6 Section 65(1) of the Act[4] does not apply.

Provisions for quality assurance
The panel was informed of how the programme submission had been proposed, developed and approved internally, in compliance with the Institute's quality assurance policies and procedures. The panel noted that the Institute's policies and procedures for programme development, monitoring and continuous improvement complied with the current national guidelines. The Institute has procedures for the periodic revalidation (normally every five years) of the programmes it validates, and the validation and revalidation reports are published.

Programme title and award title
The panel was satisfied that the title of the proposed programme is clear, accurately reflects the course contents, and will accurately inform prospective learners and other stakeholders. They are also consistent with QQI award titles.

Ethics
The panel was satisfied that the Institute has internal policies and procedures in place to ensure appropriate ethical oversight in respect of teaching, learning, and research activity across all programmes in the NFQ levels covered.

Consistency
The panel found that the programme design is consistent with QQI policy on accumulation of credits and certification of subjects, that it has an underlying unifying theme with both implicit and explicit linkage of modules. The panel was contented with expectation in progressive development of the learners' standards of knowledge, skill and competence throughout the individual modules and the integrated programme outcomes.

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

Teaching and learning
The panel discussed with the programme development team about the range of interactions used with learners throughout the programme delivery. Course management arrangements were also discussed and were deemed adequate. The panel observed clear evidence of planned interactions with, and comprehensive academic and technical support arrangements for learners.

Learner assessment
Through discussion with the programme design team, the multiple modes of assessment to be employed (both formal and informal) were articulated. The Institute's policy on continuous assessment, based on objective development/enhancement of learners' application of knowledge and critical analysis and problem solving skills within specific timeframes were highlighted. The panel encouraged the consideration of cross-modular assessment events to minimise the volume of assessment in the overall assessment schedule.

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 or competence relevant for the award of *Master of Arts (MA) in Creative Digital Media⎯UX and Interaction Design.*

Access, transfer and progression
The panel confirmed that the programme incorporates well-established procedures for access, transfer and progression. These are provided for per the Institute's Policy *3AD08 Admissions Policy*.

Other salient considerations
In the programme validation process, the panel interacted with Institute management team in the Programme Level Discussion, and with the programme development team in comprehensive Module Level Discussions.

The programme level discussion enabled the panel to gain further insight to the proposed programme, and to confirm the strategic relevance and the inherent institutional supports. The timeliness of the proposed programme in the context of Institute's application for Technological University designation (under Dublin Technological University consortium, in partnership with DIT and IT Tallaght), hence, the validation process was discussed in detail with the management team. It was expressed that the proposed programme reflected the ambition and competence that have been developed by the Department of Informatics over the last 10 years.

The module level discussions considered the panel members' observations and queries related to the programme proposal, beginning with a justification of the overarching programme structure. It also covered a module-by-module analyses and discussions with the programme team. Some notable points of discussion, included:

(1) The panel enquired why the proposed programme should be an MA and not an MSc. The programme design team articulated that the academic content was more suited to the award of MA, considering the dominant creative aspect of the programme. Entry requirements is broad, therefore processes for UX are most critical.

(2) Considering last part of point 1 above, it was noted that the process of UX/frameworks and organisation needs to be provided upfront in the programme.

(3) Activity towards development of critiquing skills were embedded in the programme, but clarity on assessment was required to ascertain expected outcome, as critiquing is integral to evaluating graphic design and performance art.

(4) Outline of the importance and need for a research methods module.

(5) The need for a comprehensive process for transfer of learners to the 60 ECTS programme pathway. It was unclear how the transfer will be managed for Quality Assurance (QA). The panel was categorical that, from a QA perspective, the programme must be crystal-clear of the evidence of academic capacity to undertake the 60 ECTS project. The panel pointed out that the object here is to protect the learner and not to inadvertently precipitate a situation that may be contested, especially where a learner fails in expectation.

Decision of the Panel

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

Programme title: **Master of Arts in Creative Digital Media (UX and Interaction Design)**

Programme code: BN541

Award Title: Master of Arts

NFQ level: 9 (90 ECTS credits)

Exit awards: Postgraduate Diploma in Arts in Creative Digital Media (UX and Interaction Design)
(*BN543 – NFQ level 9 - 60 ECTS credits*)

Minor award: Level 9 Certificate in Creative Digital Media (UX and Interaction Design)
(BN544 – NFQ level 9 - 30 ECTS credits)

Conditions of Validation

The panel recommended the validation of the Master of Arts in Creative Digital Media (UX and Interaction Design) subject to the following Conditions:

(1) Provide an explicit outline of the *Quality Assurance Process* that will be applied to determine the candidates' eligibility for the 60 ECTS research weighted pathway. Core transversal research skills must be embedded in the assessment so that it qualifies as research weighted programme. There should be embedded provisions for supporting students through the transition to develop capacity for research.

(2) The noted weaknesses in the description of Learning Outcomes (LOs) should be addressed. Specifically, the module descriptors must show how they measure that LOs have been attained via associated assessment.

(3) To review Learning Outcomes across all modules to ensure they describe module outcomes and not assessment criteria.

(4) Review workload associated with the research modules to ensure that the iterative output process, i.e., the protocol in the process for management of the research project is quality assured.

Recommendations

The panel provided the following recommendations:

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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.

(1) Since the research projects are to be executed in Semester 3, i.e., over the summer period, the programme should provide appropriate guidelines on supervision arrangements to ensure that student progress will be on schedule. The panel considered that, this can be provided for within the Learning Agreements between supervising staff and Human Resources Department, as explained by the programme team.

(2) All modules need to be described in the context of their aims and overall contribution to the practice-based masters, connectedness.

(3) The role and relation of the software development team to be more explicit.

(4) To consider that clearer measurement of practice of critiques is an integral part of evaluating graphic design and performance art, therefore; to consider the integration of critical approaches across programme modules.

Commendations

The panel commended the following aspect of the proposed programme and validation process:

(1) The programme is responding to the market demands for graduate pipeline in the related sector. The unique 60 ECTS research weighted pathway will: offer graduates a significant period to undertake original research projects that will generate publishable deliverables — which is fundamental to research scholarship, and; also prepares them for possible doctoral study.

(2) The programme team engaged the panel in informative discussions on the proposed programme.

Validation Report Sign-off

Chair

_____   _____
Dr Niall Seery   Date

Secretary

_____   _____
Dr Larry McNutt   Date