

External Peer Review Group Report



Report of External Peer Review Group for the Programmatic Review of:

Named Award:	Bachelor of Science (Honours)
Programme Title(s):	Bachelor of Science (Hons) in Applied Freshwater & Marine Biology Bachelor of Science in Applied Freshwater & Marine Biology
Exit Award(s):	N/A
Award Type:	Degree and Honours Degree
Award Class:	Major
NFQ Level:	Level 7 Level 8
ECTS / ACCS Credits:	180, 240
Location:	Galway
Minor Award(s):	N/A

Panel Members

Name	Position	Organisation
Dr. Michael Hall	Chair	IT Tralee
Carmel Brennan	Secretary	GMIT
Dr. Jeremy Bird	IOT Member	IT Sligo
Professor John Corish	University Member	TCD
Dr. Peter Tyndall	Professional Practitioner	BIM
Aoife Foley	Programme Graduate	Graduate

Programme Board Team

Des Foley	Pat Dineen	Simon Berrow
Rick Officer	Deirdre Brophy	Roisin Nash
Heather Lally	Ian O'Connor	Pauline King
Joanne O'Brien	Martin Gammell	Seamus Lennon

1 Introduction

The following report to Academic Council is the report of the Expert Panel on its review, as part of the Institute's Programmatic Review, of the Self-Evaluation Report and meetings with programme delivery teams in relation to the following programme.

- B.Sc. (Hons) in Applied Freshwater and Marine Biology

The report is divided into the following sections:

- Background to Proposed Programme
- General Findings of the Validation Panel

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- Programme-Level Findings
- Module-Level Findings

2 Background to Proposed Programme

See Programme Self Evaluation Report (SER) for more detailed information.

3 General Findings of the External Peer Review Group

Following its review of the Self-Evaluation Report and its meetings with the Department, the Programmatic Review Expert Review Panel has recommended the programme for revalidation with no conditions, but some recommendations and commendations.

Commendations:

- The panel wish to commend the staff engagement with the self-evaluation and review process.

Recommendation(s):

- The panel recommend the programme board re-consider the perceived weaknesses and threats to the programme in light of panel discussions and propose solutions to those items that are within the remit of the programme board
- The panel recommend the programme board should advise students who wish to work in the marine sector will need 3-day fire prevention, first aid and sea survival certification. The programme board may wish to consider if this could be included or facilitated in the programme.

Having considered the documentation provided and discussed it with the programme development team, the External Peer Review Group recommends the following:

Bachelor of Science (Honours) Applied Freshwater and Marine Biology & Bachelor of Science Applied Freshwater and Marine Biology

Place an x in the correct box.

Accredited for the next five academic years or until the next programmatic review, whichever occurs sooner	
Accredited subject to recommendations	X
Re-designed and re-submitted to the same External Peer Review Group after additional developmental work	
Not Accredited	

Note:

Approval is conditional on the submission of a revised programme document that takes account of the conditions and recommendations outlined below and a response document describing the actions of the Department to address the conditions and recommendations made by the External Peer Review Group (EPRG). The term Recommendation indicates an item to which the Programme Board should give serious consideration for implementation at an early stage and which should be the subject of on-going monitoring.

4 Programme-Level Findings

This section of the report addresses the following programme level considerations:

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- Evidence of reflection by the programme board to include, where relevant evidence of collaboration and engagement with other programmes from a similar discipline area within GMIT
- Demand
- Award
- Entry requirements
- Access, transfer and progression
- Retention
- Standards and Outcomes
- Programme structure
- Learning and Teaching Strategies
- Assessment Strategy
- Resource requirements
- Research Activity
- Quality Assurance
- Internationalisation
- Professional Practice (Work Experience / Internship etc)

4.1 Reflection, including internal and external engagement

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is there evidence of reflection in the SER of how the programme performed since the last programmatic review?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommend that the Programme Board should show how stakeholder feedback was considered and incorporated (or not) into the proposed programme modifications. Provide information on the numbers of stakeholders involved in the survey, and in particular determine if individual comments can be discounted / included on the basis of the number of respondents who expressed that opinion.

4.2 Demand

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is there a need for the programme and has evidence been provided to support it?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.3 Award

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is the level and type of the award appropriate?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.4 Entry Requirements

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Are the entry requirements for the proposed programme clear and
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<i>panel:</i>	appropriate? Is there a relationship with this programme and further education?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.5 Access, Transfer and Progression

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme incorporate the procedures for access, transfer and progression that have been established by the HEA and as contained in the Institute's Quality assurance Framework (QAF) COP No.4?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommend that the Programme Board should consider if student identity as Freshwater and Marine students in first year could be acknowledged in the programme content. Consider advisory sessions during first year to take full advantage of the transfer flexibility of the common first year.

4.6 Retention

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme comply with the Institute norms for retention, both in first year and subsequent years? Are both elements of the First Year Experience {(i) Learning to Learn (now Learning and Skills Innovation) and (ii) PASS} embedded in this programme? Evidence of other retention initiatives?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

A review of retention in year 1 is complicated by the fact that there is a common year 1 incorporating 11 different programmes. On average there could be 30 – 40% mature students undertaking the programme. Some years the percentage of mature students is higher and often they find the academic work overwhelming. This leads to variances in retention rates.

Recommendation(s):

- The panel recommend the panel consider the reasons for students leaving the programme, particularly at the end of second year, and determine what might be put in place to support retention. This may include school visits, open days, online media and other modes of communications of the detailed content of the programme.

4.7 Standards and Outcomes

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme meet the required award standards for programmes at the proposed NFQ level (i.e. conform to QQI Award Standards)? For parent award? For exit award (if applicable)? For Minor Award (if applicable)? For Special Purpose Award (if applicable)?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

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The awards standards requirements for programmes on the NFQ Framework can be found at http://www.hetac.ie/publications_pol01.htm

4.8 Programme Structure

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Is the programme structure logical and well designed and can the stated programme intended learning outcomes in terms of employment skills and career opportunities be met by this programme?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommends that the Programme Board consider that students will need to have proficiency in industry-relevant statistical packages, which may require introduction in first year and be developed each year in other modules.
- The Panel recommends that the Programme Board consider increasing guest speakers and site visits (including in first and second year) to support the students' understanding of the programme and career possibilities. It will also allow them to experience equipment and techniques that cannot be catered for on campus.
- The panel recommend the programme board clarify the special regulations on the Approved Programme Schedule, and add boat handling (or other short courses necessary for progression) as a special regulation if they are necessary for progression.
- Noting that emphasis historically has been on marine it is recommended that the programme board be cognisant of the relative balance of career opportunities in freshwater and marine.

4.9 Learning and Teaching Strategies

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Have appropriate learning and teaching strategies been provided for the proposed programme that support Student Centred Learning (SCL)? Evidence of consideration of flexible delivery methods including eLearning?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.10 Assessment Strategies

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Have appropriate programme assessment strategies been provided for the proposed programme (as outlined in the QQI/HETAC Assessment and Guidelines, 2009)?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Assessment strategies are required in line with HETAC's Assessment and Standards and should be considered by the programme EPRG. See (HETAC (2009) Assessment and Standards, Section 4.6.1, page 33). Accordingly the assessment strategy should address the following (See (HETAC (2009) Assessment and Standards, Section 2.2.5, page 13) :

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- Description and Rationale for the choice of assessment tasks, criteria and procedures. This should address fairness and consistency, specifically their validity, reliability and authenticity;
- Describe any special regulations;
- Regulate, build upon and integrate the module assessment strategies;
- Provide contingent strategy for cases where learners claim exemption from modules, including recognition of prior learning;
- Ensure the programme's continuous assessment workload is appropriately balanced;
- Relate to the learning and teaching strategy;
- Demonstrate how grading criteria will be developed to relate to the Institutional grading system.

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommends that the Programme Board consider establishing a schedule of assessments and assessment deadlines, and also establish a schedule of assessment feedback / advisory sessions or dates.
- On-going student feedback is important and an appropriate mechanism (e.g. membership of programme board) should be in place to facilitate this.

4.11 Resource Requirements

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the Institute possess the resources and facilities necessary to deliver the proposed programme?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommends that the Programme Board, plan content, delivery and resources for all years of the programme to cater for the number of students admitted in first year. Where lack of equipment is evident, consider what solutions are feasible.

4.12 Research Activity

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Evidence that Learning & Teaching is informed by research? Number of staff engaged in institutional/pedagogical research?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Commendation(s):

- The Panel commends the Programme Board on the level and extent of research being undertaken which is very significant, and is clearly very important to support teaching at level 8.

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommends that the Programme Boards involvement in, and outputs of research should be highlighted in the document.

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4.13 Quality Assurance

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme demonstrate how the Institute's quality assurance procedures (QAF) have been applied and that satisfactory procedures exist for the on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommends that the Programme Board consider the terms of reference of the programme board in the Institute's QA manual, and ensure that the rights and functions of the board are exercised.

4.14 Internationalisation

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme demonstrate how the syllabi represent an international dimension? Is there evidence of approaches to induct international students?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

4.15 Professional Practice (Work Experience / Internships etc)

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Does the proposed programme incorporate professional practice as per the Institute's policy on professional practice (PP)? If not, is there evidence that PP is under consideration by the programme board?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

5.0 Module-Level Findings: General

Overall findings of the panel should be documented here.

5.1 Module Assessment Strategies

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Have appropriate module assessment strategies been included in each Module Descriptor?
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

5.2 Module Level-Findings: Specific Named Modules

5.2.1 Module (Title)

Commendation(s):

- None.

Condition(s):

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- None.

Recommendation(s):

- None.

6.0 Student Findings

A 4th Year student spoke with some members of the panel. The student found the final year of the programme challenging, but is happy with her programme choice. She chose GMIT because of the interest shown by staff when she visited the campus. She suggested more time allocated to the thesis. She commended the placement, and found Learning to Learn useful, but found mintab and statistics difficult.

The panel would have liked to have spoken to some Year 1 and Year 2 students.

7.0 Stakeholder Engagement

Recommendation(s):

- The Panel recommends that the Programme Board should consider potential for short courses and CPD for relevant stakeholders, and the longer term development of provision within this discipline area.

8.0 Future Plans

Overall findings of the panel should be documented here.

<i>Consideration for the panel:</i>	Evidence that the programme board considered and identified opportunities and signalled proposals for related new programme and award development.
<i>Overall Finding:</i>	Yes

Validation Panel Report Approved By:

Signed:



Michael Hall
Chairperson

Date:

24 April 2015