



**TUS**

**Technological University of the Shannon:  
Midlands Midwest**

Ollscoil Teicneolaíochta na Sionainne:  
Lár Tíre Iarthar Láir

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**Faculty of Business and Hospitality**

**Department of Accounting and Business Computing**

**Report of Differential Validation Panel**

**Differential Validation Panel, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024**

for the

**Master of Science in Data Analytics**

and embedded

**Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Data Analytics**

**Higher Diploma in Science in Data Analytics**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report outlines, in summary form, the proceedings of the differential validation visit for the proposed:

Master of Science in Data Analytics;

Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Data Analytics;

Higher Diploma in Science in Data Analytics;

and the findings and conclusions of the Panel held on 1st May 2024. The validation was undertaken in accordance with TUS Academic Regulations. A differential validation panel makes an independent impartial judgement on a programme proposal.

## 2.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

### 2.1 Higher Education Provider

Institute: Technological University of the Shannon  
Faculty: Business and Hospitality  
Department: Accounting and Business Computing  
Date of Visit: 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024

### 2.2 Programmes Evaluated

Programme	Master of Science in Data Analytics
Award Title	Master of Science
NFQ Level	Level 9
ECTS Credits	90
Delivery Mode	Full-time/Part-time
Proposed Start Date	September 2024
Duration	1.0 Year

Programme	Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Data Analytics
Award Title	Postgraduate Diploma
NFQ Level	Level 9
ECTS Credits	60
Delivery Mode	Full-time/Part-time
Proposed Start Date	September 2024
Duration	1.0 Year

Programme	Higher Diploma in Science in Data Analytics
Award Title	Higher Diploma
NFQ Level	Level 8
ECTS Credits	60
Delivery Mode	Full-time/Part-time
Proposed Start Date	September 2024
Duration	1.0 Year

### 2.3 Differential Validation Panel of Expert Assessors

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Emeritus Prof. Marie Parker-Jenkins	University of Limerick
Dr. Owen Foley	Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
James Sheridan	Ericsson
Radvile Razmunte	Student Representative/Graduate
Secretary to Panel	Dr. Brendan Murphy
Quality Officer	Cora Mc Cormack

## **2.4 Institute Staff**

Interim Dean of Faculty of Business and Hospitality

Dr. Michael Tobin

Head of Department of Accounting

& Business Computing

Bernard Tao Cui

Head of Department of Business and financial Services

James Collins

### Programme Team

David Leonard

Noel Tierney

Barry O'Loughlin

Patricia Gunning

Jonny O'Dwyer

Brenda Reilly

Paul Liston

Pearce Harney-Nolan

## **2.5 Documentation**

1. Existing and Proposed Programme Documents.
2. Summary of Rationale for the Proposal.
3. Summary of Comparative Programme Changes.
4. Report of Original Programme Validation Panel.
5. TUS Policy and Procedures for Differential Validation Policy if a Major Award.

### **3.0 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF EXTERNAL VALIDATION PANEL**

#### **3.1 Main Findings**

The Panel of Assessors recommends approval of the proposed:

Master of Science in Data Analytics;

Postgraduate Diploma in Science in Data Analytics;

Higher Diploma in Science in Data Analytics.

#### **3.2 Conditions**

- 1) Conduct a review after Semester 1, and on an ongoing basis, of the impact of the programme changes on:
  - a) student engagement; and,
  - b) student success rates.

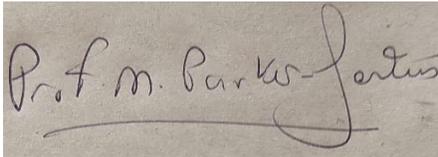
#### **3.3 Recommendations**

- 1) Make explicit in the Programme Handbook the supports available to students including for independent learning, academic writing skills, English language and cultural supports.
- 2) Consider how dedicated support and Continuous Professional Development can be provided for staff to support student independent learning and its assessment. This may include a range of factors such as the cultural perspectives of student cohorts, development of academic writing skills and the development of asynchronous and online resources. Engage with the Centre for Pedagogical Innovation & Development centre in this context.
- 3) Maintain and enhance the important class space to facilitate independent learning, in line with the renewed emphasis on independent learning in the revised programme.

#### **3.4 Commendations and Observations**

- 1) The panel commend the adjustment and reallocation of directed to independent learning in a manner that supports learning, including the extensive utilisation of multi-modal asynchronous learning resources.
- 2) The panel thank the programme team for the comprehensive documentation including the rationale for the programme changes, comparative mapping and revised programme documents.

- 3) The panel appreciated the detailed and rigorous discussions and the helpful clarifications provided by Management and the Programme Team.
- 4) The panel commends the team approach that was very evident in discussion.

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored, textured paper. The signature reads "Prof. M. Parker-Jentus" in a cursive script. The text is underlined with a single horizontal line.

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Signature of Chairperson

Date: 20/08/2024

## 4.0 APPENDIX

### 9.30am PRIVATE MEETING OF ASSESSORS

The Chairperson, Prof. Marie Parker Jenkins welcomed all members and outlined the purpose and context of the meeting and noted that the panel acts on behalf of the Academic Council to validate new programmes for the University. The Chairperson asked panel members to introduce themselves and to detail their areas of expertise .

The Chairperson noted that the programme had undergone a programmatic review in December 2022. It is now being presented as part of the current differential validation process to align the programme with the *TUS Framework for Taught Masters Programmes* approved by TUS Academic Council in December 2023. The presentation of the programme through differential validation is to align a revised programme with this principle and to adjust the associated directed and independent learning hours.

The Chair outlined the Agenda for the day detailing the focus of the respective sessions. The Chair asked the panel for their initial observations and to identify any areas of focus. The panel noted that the documentation is very well laid out and the individual modules are very well written. The areas identified for further discussion included:

- clarification of the rationale for the revision to the programme;
- further detail for the pedagogical basis for increased independent learning;
- implication for workload of lecturers;
- the decision to reduce all modules evenly as some modules require more reflection than others;
- supports for students in the context of revised hours.

The Chairperson and panel broadly agreed areas for discussion with Management and the Programme Team.

## **10.30am MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

TUS Senior Management was represented by Mr. Michael Tobin Interim Dean of Faculty of Business and Hospitality, Mr. Bernard Tao Cui, Head of Dept. of Accounting & Business Computing and Mr. Jame Collins, Head of Dept. of Business & Financial Services, TUS Midwest. The panel and team introduced themselves. The Chairperson thanked TUS for the invitation to review the proposed programme.

### Strategic Focus

The Management team outlined the context of the differential validation in accordance with the Academic Council approved Framework for Taught Masters programmes. In keeping with the pedagogical principle of independent learner development, the TUS Framework specifies that “*the contact delivery of a taught Masters programme is not more than 14 hours*”. The team outlined how there has been a re-allocation of hours from directed to independent learning in the revised programme and an associated revision to the assessment strategy that take account of this change. The Chairpersons noted that the expertise of the panel is very appropriate for the programmes under consideration.

The panel queried now the changes were made and if theory have been thought through from a student perspective. Dean of Faculty, Mr. Michel Tobin, noted that the programmes were exemplars of collaboration across the new University and congratulated the two Heads of Department for their leadership of this. Mr Tobin then delivered a presentation and provided an overview of the Faculty and its constituent departments, including a profile of overall student numbers. The TUS overall strategy was overviewed including the objectives for the Education priority. It was noted that analytics is becoming increasingly important across the University. The primary programmes presented at the current differential validation have good intakes with both the Full-time and Part-time MSc. Offerings attracting up to 20 students. The Higher Diploma offering acts as a conversion programme and is delivered online with typical cohorts of up to 25 students. The overall TUS University Strategy

The core changes to the programmes were outlined including some syllabus changes and changes to hours. It was noted that the reduction was spread relatively evenly with most modules reduced by 1 hour of direct contact to average 14 hours per week over the full academic year, in accordance with the TUS Masters Framework. Delivery includes a

combination of synchronous delivery and the provision of comprehensive asynchronous learning resources. It is important to recognise that synchronous and asynchronous are directed learning from the student perspective and Moodle pages and associated resources are aligned to this principle. The panel queried if the asynchronous 1 hour replaces a synchronous hour and it was clarified that it does. The team noted that all online lectures are recorded and then provided as an asynchronous support. This provides flexibility and accessibility to students. The panel queried if the number of enrolments in data analytics programme is increasing. The team noted that after a period of rapid growth the numbers are now levelling off. The home domestic learner is now being balanced with an increasing number of international students. The programme in the Limerick campus is now mainly filled by international students. A front loading of hours in Semester 1 helps to support the diversity of student backgrounds.

The panel queried, if from a student perspective, the reduction in hours could potentially have a negative impact on recruitment to the programme. The team noted that employers now require a different skill set including independent learning, group and team work and individuals who are independent and autonomous learners and engage more with peers. The ideal is that we are also supporting the learner. Graduates are supported to be more enabled to be work ready. They are on campus, have full access to academic staff, and supported. It was also noted that these are Level 9 Master students and need to be able to engage with peers.

#### Relevant Staffing, Facilities and Resource Issues

The panel discussed staffing, facilities and resources with the programme team and queried if the ratio of Full-time to Part-time staff was appropriate. The team confirmed that there was adequate staffing, including full-time staff, in place and in hours expertise to cover the curriculum. The need for dedicated space to support the programme in the Moylish campus was highlighted as important, particularly with the increased focus on independent learning.

### **10.30am MEETING WITH PROGRAMME TEAM**

The Chairperson welcomed the programme team to the meeting and both members of the panel and programme team briefly introduced themselves. The engagement with the team centred around the proposed changes to the existing programmes. It was outlined that there is a programme co-ordinator assigned to each of the three programmes.

The programme team outlined that while the content of the programmes presented remains the same, the hours have been adjusted in line with the TUS Framework for Taught Masters Programme Development, which states that in keeping with the pedagogical principle of independent learner development, the contact delivery of taught masters' programmes may not be more than 14 hours.

Discussion took place on what impact this would have and the necessary supports required for the students given that they will be required to carry out a number of self-directed learning hours going forward. It was noted that the reduction in hours would be replaced with asynchronous material, such as case studies, slides etc and this would be shared with students on Moodle. Students will be provided with the opportunity to raise any questions they may have on this platform and they will be provided with the opportunity to discuss these with their lecturer at their next scheduled class. Feedback will be also be uploaded on Moodle by the lecturer together with solutions in a timely fashion and students will be encouraged to make contact with the lecturers through this medium. It is planned that a number of tutorial hours will be facilitated at various stages throughout the semester, which provides a further means of support to the student. It was highlighted that there is a large cohort of international students participating on these programmes and while they collaborate with each other additional supports would be of the utmost importance to them. The panel asked that the supports available to students should be made explicit in the Student Handbook. These include support for independent learning, academic writing skills, English language and cultural supports, inter alia.

It was agreed that the new self-directed learning model will be of significant benefit to the student in the long term as when they are in future employment they will have had the experience of working on their own initiative and completing tasks which ultimately will lead to more valuable and competent employees.

The panel highlighted that it would be important that the Faculty and Department would consider how dedicated support and Continuous Professional Development can be provided for staff to support student independent learning and its assessment. The panel also emphasised the importance of ongoing monitoring of the effect of the proposed changes on student learning.

### **11.30am PRIVATE MEETING OF ASSESSORS**

The panel reviewed draft minutes and discussed the contributions of Management and the Programme team. The panel indicated that they would be happy to approve the programme, with one condition as outlined in Section 3.2, pertaining to ongoing monitoring of the effect of the programme changes on student engagement and success. A small number of recommendations would be provided with the aim of enhancing the programme when implemented. The wording of the recommendations was developed, and these are presented in Section 3.3 of this report. The panel noted several commendations and these are outlined in Section 3.4 of this report.

### **12.15pm MEETING WITH SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

In the concluding session, the Chairperson of the External Validation Panel, Prof. Marie Parker Jenkins, briefed Mr. Michael Tobin Interim Dean of Faculty of Business and Hospitality and Mr. Bernard Tao Cui, Head of Dept. of Accounting & Business Computing. on the outcome of the day.

The Chairperson outlined the preliminary views of the validation panel and stated that the panel were happy to approve the proposed programme. The panel would make a small number of recommendations in the spirit of enhancing the programme. The Chairperson then provided an overview of the recommendation and commendations to the team.

Mr Michael Tobin welcomed the findings and thanked the Chairperson and panel on behalf of TUS for their appraisal and for their comprehensive review. Mr Bernard Tao Cui thanked the programme team for the worked involved.

The Chairperson, Prof. Marie Parker Jenkins, thanked the panel for their time and effort in the review of the programme.

**12.30pm CONCLUSION**

The external validation visit concluded.