

Validation Report



BN118

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

(240 ECTS credits leading to NFQ Level 8 Award)

with the following embedded programmes

BN030

Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education

(180 ECTS credits leading to NFQ Level 7 Award)

BN024

Higher Certificate in Arts in Early Childhood Studies

(120 ECTS credits leading to NFQ Level 6 Award)

BN418

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

(Add on award to BN030 - 60 ECTS credits leading to NFQ Level 8 Award)

Introduction

The Institute of Technology Blanchardstown was established in 1999. The mission of the Institute is to serve its students and the community by meeting the skills needs in the economy and increasing the level of participation in third-level education and training, particularly in Dublin North-West and its environs.

The Institute in 2006 was awarded delegated authority enabling the development, validation, implementation and continuous improvement of its existing taught higher education and training programmes up to and including level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

In keeping with the Institute's mission statement, course and programme development is on-going. Community and social development were identified as a potential area for development and further investigation indicated a strong demand for courses in this academic area. This programme supports the mission of the Institute and facilitates much wider access to the Institute by a cohort of potential students whose needs are currently not being met.

The purpose of this document is to report on the findings of the peer review panel established to validate this proposed programme against the criteria for the validation of programmes as stipulated in the Institute policy document 2MP01¹.

This submission by the School of Business and Humanities evolved through:

- examining the competence, expertise and experience of its staff in addition to the strategy of the department/school/Institute and Government educational policy.
- needs identified through consultation with representatives of agencies/organisations with a remit in early childhood care and education within the Institute's catchment area.

¹ 2MP01 Design, validation and accreditation of new academic programmes

Programme overview

This programme is designed to provide students with core knowledge in areas identified as essential for the development of professionals working in the area of early childhood care and education. Years one and two aim to provide the learners with knowledge in key areas of early childhood care and education, identified by the model framework for education, training and professional development in the early childhood care and education sector. These are: child development, education and play, social environment, health hygiene nutrition and safety, personal professional development, communication management and administration and supervised practice.

The third year of the programme while building on the knowledge gained will develop knowledge of established principles in the more specialised areas of contemporary professional practice in childcare and education, the legal context of childcare, second language development and business skills for the childcare sector. Additional modules in education and play aim to give learners skills in developing language and numeracy through creative activities. It also introduces the learner to research methods for the early years. A second project placement where the learner is more active in operating with more autonomy and responsibility also aims to develop knowledge relating to the implementation of childcare practice.

The fourth year of the programme aims to develop the knowledge base of the learner towards an understanding of the theory, concepts and methods pertaining to the field of early childhood care and education. It aims to offer the learner the opportunity to engage at a higher level in familiar areas through the study of comparative social policy, business management, advanced assessment of childhood disorders and interventions, intervention and management of challenging behaviour, and child protection. Additional modules are offered in diversity for education, facilitating second language acquisition and developing emotional intelligence. The dissertation in Year 4 aims to provide the learner with the opportunity to develop their knowledge base in an area of particular interest to the individual.

Due to the innovative design, learner focus and practical content of this programme it will cater not only for school-leavers interested in pursuing a career in early childhood care and education but also cater for those already working in the sector wishing to obtain or add to their academic qualifications.

Programme detail

Programme title	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Care and Education
Award title	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
NFQ^I level	8
ECTS^{II} credits	240
Programme code	BN118
Banner code	BN_HECHC_8

Embedded awards

Banner code	ITB code	Programme title	Award title	ECTS credits	Format
BN_HECHC_7	BN030	Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education	Bachelor of Arts	Level 7 180 credits	Ab initio
BN_HECHC_C	BN024	Higher Certificate in Arts in Early Childhood Studies	Higher Certificate in Arts	Level 6 120 credits	Ab initio
BN_HECHC_B	BN418	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Care and Education	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)	Level 8 60 credits	Add on

^I National Framework of Qualifications

^{II} European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

Panel members

Chairperson	Dr. Derek O'Byrne Waterford Institute of Technology
Panel member 1	Ms. Gráinne McKenna Fingal County Childcare Committee
Panel member 2	Dr. Elizabeth Nixon Trinity College Dublin
Panel member 3	Ms. Holly Gillen Barnardos
Panel member 4	Mr. Gerry McTaggart Dundalk Institute of Technology
In attendance	Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan IT Blanchardstown Mr. Michael Keane IT Blanchardstown
Date of Panel Meeting	Thursday 25 th February 2010

Institute staff present

Session I Meeting with Head of School and programme leaders

Mr. Michael Tobin, Head of School of Business and Humanities

Dr. Celesta McCann James, Head of Department of Humanities

Dr. Ruth Harris

Ms. Deirdre McGrath

Ms. Sandra Ratcliffe

Session II Meeting with lecturing staff

Mr. Michael Tobin, Head of School of Business and Humanities

Dr. Celesta McCann James, Head of Department of Humanities

Dr. Ruth Harris

Ms. Deirdre McGrath

Ms. Sandra Ratcliffe

Dr. Bríd Ní Chonaill

Mr. Aiden Carthy

Ms. Denise Lyons

Ms. Lavinia McLean

Ms. Maria Kenneally

Ms. Siobhán Quinlan

Mr. Tom Donohoe

Panel findings

In evaluating the appropriateness, quality and proposed operation of this programme the following criteria has been considered and is hereby reported upon:

Strategic planning

The panel was satisfied that the programme is in keeping with the Institute's mission, that it does not constitute redundant provision and that it makes efficient use of resources. The panel following discussion was satisfied with the planned staffing arrangements but recommended that a gap analysis be completed to ensure that all necessary skill sets are identified and where necessary sourced prior to the delivery of this programme. See recommendations.

Evidence of consultation

The panel were informed of how a number of phases of research were carried out by the design team in the development of this programme including:

- Research into existing courses in early childhood care and education offered by FETAC, the Institute of Technology, and University sectors.
- Initial consultation with stakeholders in the local area, such as the Dublin City Childcare Committee, Fingal and Meath Local County Childcare Committees, the Irish Preschool Play Association (IPPA) and the National Children's Nurseries Association (NCNA).
- Review of official publications which would inform the development of the programme including:

NCCA (2009) Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework.

CECDE (2006) Síolta, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education

Department of Education and Science (1999) Ready to Learn White Paper on Early Childhood Education.

Government of Ireland (2006) The Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations.

Government of Ireland (2002) Model Framework for Education, Training and Professional Development in the Early Childhood Care and Education Sector.

Minister for Education and Science (2009) *Developing the workforce in the early childhood care and education sector. Background discussion paper.*

Office of the Minister for Children (2006) *National Childcare Strategy 2006-2010 A Guide for Parents.* Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Health and Children (2000) *National Children's Strategy Our Children - Their Lives.*

While suitably impressed with the programme design teams review of official publications the panel however highlighted the importance of including the “National Agenda for children’s services” document as recommended by both the Minister for children and the Ombudsman for children to further inform the development of this programme.

➤ Formal consultation with key stakeholders including:

Fingal County Childcare Committee

Barnardos

Dublin City Childcare Committee

Health Service Executive - Dublin North Central

Health Service Executive - Dublin North West

Bright Horizons Family Solutions

Irish Preschool Play Association (IPPA)

The panel commended the design team on the depth, quality and the comprehensive nature of this consultation process.

Learner employment potential

On completion of this programme, graduates will have the knowledge skills and competences to practice as early childhood professionals in a number of settings such as crèches, nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools, primary schools and breakfast / homework clubs. They would also be able to practice in more specialist areas such as special needs services or early intervention projects. Graduates may be employed in the public, private or voluntary sectors.

Protection of learners

Section 43 of the Act¹ does not apply.

Quality assurance

The panel was informed of how the submission had been developed and approved internally whilst complying with the Institute's quality assurance policies and procedures. The panel concurred that said policies and procedures had been applied to the development of the proposed programme.

Programme titles and award titles

Following discussion, the panel was satisfied that the title of the proposed programme, and its embedded sub-awards is clear, accurate and fit for the purpose of informing prospective learners and other stakeholders and consistent with HETAC award titles.

Ethics

The panel was satisfied that the Institute has internal policies and procedures in place to ensure that all teaching, learning or research activity across the spectrum of NFQ levels is conducted / delivered in a manner that is both morally and professionally ethical.

Unity

The panel found that the programme design is consistent with HETAC's policy on accumulation of credits and certification of subjects, that it has an underlying unifying theme with modules bonded by linkages being either implicit or explicit. It was also clear to the panel how the standards of knowledge, skill and competence evolve throughout the programme as a whole.

Teaching and learning

The panel discussed with staff of the Institute the various modes of interaction practised with learners. Evidence of a clear dialogue was confirmed, enabling learners to develop and have available to them the support of academic staff.

¹ Qualifications (Education and Training) Act, 1999

Course management arrangements were discussed and deemed adequate, these included:

- survey of students by lecturer
- summary of survey of students by lecturer
- survey of students by department
- course boards
- ITB Garda vetting process
- placement co-ordinator
- placement policy
- placement tripartite meetings
- course handbooks

The panel following discussion was assured that the necessary staffing levels and sufficient support structures will be in place and were suitably impressed with the qualifications, experience, competence and commended the obvious energy and enthusiasm of the staff concerned.

Relevance

Given the high proportion of young families in Dublin 15, the level of provision of childcare and education services is high and is likely to continue to be so in the future. Also according to recent studies almost 22% of the population of the Blanchardstown area are non-Irish nationals, which is double the national average. To reflect this, the programme incorporates multi-cultural and inter-cultural dimensions throughout many of the modules with specific modules in cultural diversity and inter-culturalism in early learning environments, and understanding and facilitating second language acquisition.

The panel recognised that the proposed programme is in keeping with ITB's mission statement to serve the needs of the local community and that it supports two priorities outlined in the Institute's current strategic plan¹ namely, the achievement of a more diverse student community and making ITB a vital resource for the region.

¹ Strategic Plan 2006 -2011 making education accessible

Learner assessment

Through discussion with the design team, and from the submission document itself it was explained in detail to the panel the multiple modes of assessment, both formal and informal that will be employed. The panel however raised concerns over the volume and load of learner assessment for the proposed programme. See recommendations.

Standards of knowledge, skill and competence

The panel felt having reviewed the syllabi and assessment methods that learners would be capable of attaining the standards of knowledge, skill or competence relevant for this award.

Access, transfer and progression

The programme incorporates the established procedures for access, transfer and progression allowing students to choose from various entry and exit points that support clear transfer and progression routes within the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). The panel highlighted the importance of mapping the programme standards towards potential future professional accreditation. See recommendations.

Decision of the panel

The panel recommends the validation of the proposed programme including its embedded awards namely:

Banner code	ITB code	Programme title	Award title	ECTS credits	Format
BN_HECHC_8	BN118	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Early Childhood Care and Education	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)	Level 8 240 credits	Ab initio
BN_HECHC_7	BN030	Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education	Bachelor of Arts	Level 7 180 credits	Ab initio
BN_HECHC_C	BN024	Higher Certificate in Arts in Early Childhood Studies	Higher Certificate in Arts	Level 6 120 credits	Ab initio
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Condition

The panel welcomed the possibility of a part-time programme but were of the opinion that the level 7 Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education as proposed be offered initially in full-time and work based mode only.

Panel recommendations

Programme structure

- Reconsider the structure of the proposed programme and its embedded awards to create separate part-time offerings to learners not currently employed within the childcare sector.
- Review the work-based programme to include a suite of relevant modules to be offered to those working within the childcare sector as an alternative to the current work placements.
- Increase visibility to alignment of programme learning outcomes with current standards of the childcare industry. Also reconsider both the content and titles of modules in the child development and education and play strands to further strengthen the learning outcomes relating to industry standards such as Síolta and Aistear as this may assist in acquiring professional accreditation in the future.

Contact hours and assessment:

- Review class contact hours and educational support needs at a modular level to support the learning needs of:
 - Work-based learners.
 - Part-time learners not employed in a relevant employment setting (when new part-time programme is developed).
- Employ standard normative contact hours across all modules throughout the programme (60 hours was considered above the norm for a 5-credit module).
- Review the lecture / workshop ratio within modules to facilitate the delivery and operation of this programme within a viable business framework while also providing further clarity on the content and learning outcomes of each workshop. Specifically, the need for small group tuition in specific modules, or parts of modules, needs to be justified.
- Review the number and volume of separate assessments. Consider using cross-modular assessments as a means of reducing the volume and load of learner assessment. Generate assessment matrix and map assessments to specific programme learning outcomes.
- Consider including online material to further enhance the learning experience of the student, particularly in the context of reduced contact hours in work-based and part-time programmes.

Staff expertise

- Perform a gap analysis on staff expertise to identify any childcare skill sets that may need strengthening to deliver this programme.

Module content

- Reconsider the delineation of the applied psychology component across the child development modules strengthening the focus on application in real world situations within the third and fourth years of the programme.
- Consider introducing a Speech and Language component earlier in the programme within both the child development and education and play strands to give learners a broader working knowledge prior to commencing placement.
- Reconsider the content of the business management modules to focus more on the business requirements of a small to medium sized childcare practitioner.
- Consider amending the dissertation module and adjusting other modules as a means of achieving the necessary learning outcomes without the requirement to conduct active research at undergraduate level.
- Consider the inclusion of additional module(s) to accommodate learners that exit on a Higher Certificate programme due to difficulty in completing placement.
- Make other technical and minor amendments as discussed at the panel meeting.

Panel observations

The panel commended the quality and detail of the proposal and congratulated the design team on this initiative to identify, address and respond to this sector's needs locally whilst producing a viable, innovative and industry focussed programme. They concurred on the wide range of skills a graduate seeking employment would require and felt that these were well reflected in the programme. They also commended the design team on the depth, quality and the comprehensive nature of the consultation process undertaken in the design of this programme.

Panel signatures

Chairperson

Dr. Derek O'Byrne _____ Date _____

Secretary

Dr. Diarmuid O'Callaghan _____ Date _____