BIRMINGHAM CITY University

BCU PSF Application form – Senior Fellow (D3)

Submit this application as one file (including referee statements and any other evidence relevant to your application), by email to psf@bcu.ac.uk

Name		**Date**	
Role/job title			
Faculty/School			

Case study 1

This should demonstrate your sustained effectiveness in relation to teaching and/or supporting learning, to meet the D3 criteria. This could focus on an example of leading, managing and enhancing the curriculum of a course in your school, where influence and impact can be demonstrated. [Actual word count: 1403]

Introduction

This first case study demonstrates my sustained effectiveness in relation to teaching and supporting learning in the Faculty, through course development and appropriately aligning teaching, learning and assessment practices. It will show how I worked with the Associate Dean of Research (ADR) to develop an overarching framework that led to the design of two research oriented MA awards, further emphasizing my commitment to linking research and teaching.

In 2015 I took on the role of Researcher Education and Development (RED) Coordinator for ADM. A key objective of this role was to work closely with the ADR to implement the Faculty's research strategy in preparation for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) of 2021. An essential aspect of this was to enhance routes-in to PhD study. In 2014, ADM were part of a successful collaborative funding application to the Arts and Humanities Research Council named MidlandsThreeCities (M3C), which brought together six universities from the Midlands region to form a Doctoral Training Partnership. As part of this partnership, ADM needed to demonstrate a commitment to establishing a clear 'pipeline' to PhD study through suitable Masters awards that fully prepare students for the demands of doctoral level study. I was tasked with writing a policy for research oriented masters awards, and leading colleagues to design new awards that would meet the needs identified by the policy. The ADR wanted to ensure that these awards would draw on the research expertise of the award leader to ensure that their research informs the design of the curriculum, but also contributes to the professional development of students for making PhD applications, or identifying a route into professional practice.

Stage One: The Policy

Before writing the policy I performed an audit of Masters award provision across ADM to discover whether they had research components in place. This involved reviewing programme specifications, course evaluations and external examiner reports [K5, K6]. I found that the Schools of Music, Media and Art offered a number of awards that contained a research methodology module, and options to produce a dissertation or

practice project as final piece of assessment. However, I identified that that the majority of awards offered no research component, and therefore not being suitable as a routein to PhD; they were more oriented towards vocational practice. I also explored how other HEIs in the M3C consortium, such as the Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham, approached their MA provision and found that they adopted a graduate school ethos. According to Austin (2002), graduate schools can play a significant part in the development of an academic and also encourage interaction between disciplines. An investigation into the student experience of interdisciplinary masters' programmes also concluded that "the nature of the skill development in IDL [inter disciplinary learning] particularly lends itself to learning outcomes at PGT [postgraduate taught] level, where there is an emphasis on advanced transferable kills and metacognitive skill development' and a desire for PGRs to undertake such projects (McEwen et al. 2009: 71). Furthermore, graduate schools are also supported by a strong researcher development programme that helps to construct an inclusive community amongst all postgraduate researchers, and develop transferable skills [V3].

From this audit I was able to draft a policy that proposed an Arts, Cultural and Creative Industries Postgraduate Research Community, advocated the adoption of a 'graduate school ethos' and made the following recommendations:

- Introduce the model of research orientated MAs as routes to PhD and early career research status, developing the career of graduates
- Follow the 'Pipeline' model as recommended by the Midlands3Cities funding scheme
- Encourage interdisciplinary cross school working
- Increase MA recruitment and, in the long-term, PhD recruitment
- Create an economically viable and sustainable suite of MA awards
- Establish an inclusive postgraduate research community that enables PGRs to network, collaborate and develop.

Drawing on my own previous experience of module and course design through participating in revalidations of awards, and developing undergraduate programmes such as BA (Hons) English and Media [A1, A2] I produced an overarching course structure for research oriented MAs that followed the QAA Characteristics Statement for a Masters Degrees (2015) and Birmingham City University's 2015 Academic Plan [K2, K6]. The structure maintained a balance between subject-specific content, professional development, and interdisciplinary working, but was also cost effective through the sharing of modules. For instance, each award would have two subject-specific modules, one shared subject-specific module, a shared research methods module, two shared modules that support the professional and academic development of postgraduate researchers [A4, K3], and finally a major project that offers the option of practice route or a dissertation. To support this, I stressed the need for regular mentoring from staff with the relevant research expertise to help guide potential PGRs through the award, and meet their objectives, which might include preparing an application for PhD, or for a professional position [V1, V4]. The policy was approved by the Faculty Executive Group,

who praised its “commitment to cross school exchange and interdisciplinary working”, and distributed it across the Faculty.

Stage Two: Course Design

As evidence of the successful impact that my policy and continued mentoring of colleagues has had, I now focus on how two MA awards, Contemporary Arts China; and Media Cultural Studies, were designed using the policy I introduced, and how this supported teaching and learning in the faculty. After reading the policy, a Professor in the Faculty contacted me, expressing an interest in introducing a new Masters in Contemporary Arts China. I mentored the Professor's post doctorate to design the award and make sure that it met the requirements of my policy [K6]. This mentoring involved regular meetings, and reviewing course documentation in preparation for externally validating the award. By taking the role I was able to ensure that the course followed QAA requirements, and that learning objectives were appropriately aligned with assessment. I also advised on the development of the shared research methodology module Research in Practice, to make sure it was suitable for cross-disciplinary students, and that supporting learning resources were made available through Moodle [K4]. The award was successfully validated in 2016.

Alongside this award, I designed MA Media and Cultural Studies. To achieve this, I led eight colleagues from the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research to design modules that would contribute to the make-up of the award. I arranged regular meetings with colleagues, and reviewed paperwork they produced to ensure that the subject material was at the necessary level, and the standard of teaching and learning was appropriate [K1, K2]. Through involving a group of colleagues in the design of the award, I was able to ensure that there was peer review of course content [K5], and an opportunity for others to evaluate chosen approaches to teaching and learning. I also was able to give colleagues the chance to teach their own research, asking them to produce modules that had a clear link to their own scholarship [A5]. Once all the paperwork was obtained, I collated it all and wrote the overarching programme specification that was approved by the ADR, and sent for validation, which was successful. Some months later, a colleague from the faculty who was revalidating her own MA award contacted me to say that she had used my programme specification as a template, and wanted to thank me for "inspiring" and "motivating" her. This evidences how my practice had impact on other provision in another school.

Conclusion

It in 2017/2018, MA Contemporary Arts China recruited a small cohort of eight students and already two of these first students have successfully secured funding and places for PhDs in October 2018 [V2, A5]. The success of this award in terms of recruitment and achievements has been recognized by BCU in the creation of a new permanent full-time course leader post from Oct 2018. MA Media and Cultural Studies recruited six students, one of whom has applied to study for a PhD at BCU [V2, A5]. This is evidence of the success of my mentoring and the strength of the policy and framework I introduced. To support these new MAs, I argued for the release of institutional funds to provide a number of fee waivers that would help draw applicants to these awards, and provide a clear route into PhD. This had an impact on enabling a widening-participation agenda in the recruitment of Masters' students, particularly within the current HE context of increasing student debt, and providing diverse communities the opportunity to engage in postgraduate study [V4].

Reference list

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McEwen, L., Jennings, R., Duck, R., Roberts, H. (2009) *Students' experiences of interdisciplinary Masters' courses*. The Higher Education Academy Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning Group. Available at: https://www.llas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/nodes/3219/interdisciplinary_masters.pdf [Accessed on 9 August 2018].

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