



Specific needs of different modes of delivery: Part-time Continuing Education at NCAD

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Relevant element of ESG Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards	

Abstract

The development of part time art and design courses for mature students at NCAD, coincided with a period of significant change in higher education. The introduction of part-time progression routes and credit accumulation is outlined here in the context of European developments. While recognising external factors as significant in driving change, implementation at a local level within third level can present multiple challenges.

Continuing Education at NCAD

Since 2000, the Centre for Continuing Education in Art and Design (CEAD) at NCAD has been involved in re-configuring the courses it provides to part-time undergraduate mature students. The original programme offered short courses in a range of art and design subjects. While the courses were popular, the programme had grown organically but in an ad hoc manner, there were no accredited courses or progression routes.

Widening Participation in Higher Education

Following a period of research, the Centre for Continuing Education in Art and Design at NCAD, began a process of curriculum development, which resulted in significant change to the part-time programme. Since 2001, a series of Certificate courses have been developed including; Drawing-Visual Investigation, Photography and Digital Imaging, and a Diploma in Art and Design. In 2007, a new Certificate in Visual Art Practice was developed, containing multiple modules. The course consists of twelve audit credit modules, offering students significant choice within four categories (1) drawing and visual research; (2) materials and media; (3) discipline experience (4) visual culture. Students choose one module from each category, besides this constraint, they construct their own pathway or flexible progression route to a Certificate. Students who choose the audit-credit route can take multiple modules within one year, or spread them over a three-year period.

Students who complete Certificates with CEAD are eligible to apply for the second year of the part-time diploma.

Currently Continuing Education at NCAD caters for 1,000, part-time students annually and offers 300 places on accredited courses. Mature students can opt for short non-accredited introductory courses, stand alone Certificates, a Diploma or take the audit credit modules and build their own pathway toward progression. At each stage students can exit and take credit, or progress further. Continuing Education also organise an annual open day and exhibition for mature students.

Challenges

For continuing education staff, the move toward increased accreditation involved developing and delivering courses with other staff, working in teams, as well as ensuring that new part-time courses were modularised and linked to mainstream undergraduate provision.

Within NCAD the integration of part-time flexible courses has presented numerous challenges including; accommodating flexible pathways from a learner perspective as well as administrative viewpoint, ensuring quality of learning, and improving communication with key stakeholders.

The development of flexible pathways, has also raised questions concerning discipline boundaries, curriculum change and student choice. Curriculum change coupled with disciplinary identity is a complex area, best mediated through negotiation, discourse and with resources.

External Factors drive change

Many of the changes that have occurred in CEAD were inevitable responses to changes in policy in lifelong learning and higher education. The implications of the Bologna agreement are far-reaching, this initiative alongside the National Framework for Qualifications has brought significant change to higher education, including; greater transparency, transfer, flexibility, quality assurance and mobility for staff and students. The benefit for part-time learners includes the accumulation of credit through modularisation, flexibility and the development of minor awards progressing to major awards.

With Bologna and the NFQ, there is also a new language, which is concerned with: ects, modules, learning outcomes, quality assurance, the diploma supplement, awards, levels, and cycles.

Communicating the language of Bologna et al, to key stakeholders within higher education is important and the development of resource materials is part of this process. At NCAD a number of learning and teaching resource materials, including; learning outcome templates, assessment and curriculum documents that are accessible to staff have been developed. Equally communicating new courses to students through an annual brochure and on-line material has been a feature of continuing education developments.

