# REFLECTIONS

## How can we design and redesign courses to increase student success and satisfaction?

by David Baume PhD SFSEDA FHEA

## Introduction

Some 35 staff from across the University worked on this topic for three hours on the morning of Friday April 8th 2011. Here are summarised some of the ideas they explored, and then applied to the design or redesign of their courses, informed by University priorities on employability and retention. The workshop resources[1] are available from the Centre for Educational Development.
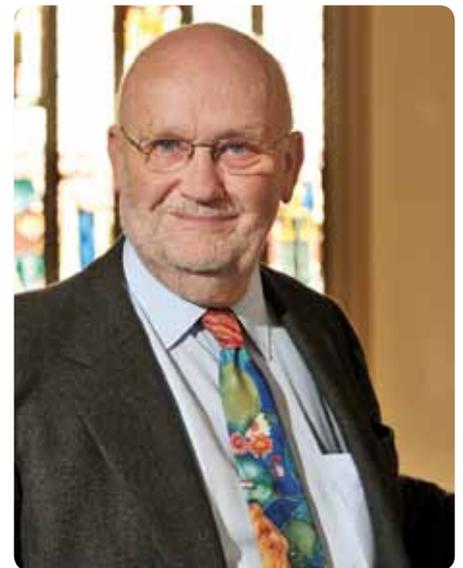


David Baume PhD SFSEDA FHEA

## What is a course?

We might think of a course as:

1. A set of content, to be taught to students. We might also call this a syllabus, or a curriculum.

2. A series of lessons or classes, in which we will teach the content to the students.

3. Either or both of the above, together with processes for assessment and giving feedback.

4. Something else again.

5. The work that students do, and the ways in which we help them to do this work, towards achieving the goals of the course.

The workshop concentrated on this 5th, learning-centred, account of a course. This account does not exclude content, or lessons or classes, or assessment and feedback. It simply puts them in their proper place – that is, in support of students learning to do the subject.

## Planning a course as the work that students do and the ways in which we help them to do this work

Starting from this account of a course, participants explored, tested and used a four-stage model for planning a course:

| Stage | Questions to answer in designing the course | Comments on answering this question to plan a course |
|---|---|---|
| Goals | What is the course intended to achieve?<br><br>What should students be able to do by the end of the course[2]? | Answering these questions; in a clear, attractive, honest, engaging way; is a vital first step in planning any course. |
| Assessment | How will we and students know if students have achieved these goals? | Why consider assessment this early in the course design process?<br><br>- If you can't assess achievement of the learning outcome, there may be a problem with the learning outcome; and<br><br>- A good final assessment task gives a clear direction for both lecturers and students. |
| Learning Activities | What learning activities will students do to help them achieve these goals? | A useful model of learning suggests that we learn by doing small, simple, purposeful tasks; receiving feedback; exploring some new ideas and approaches; then undertaking larger and more complex tasks; and so onwards and upwards. |
| Support | How will you support and resource students to achieve, and to know that they have achieved, these goals? | Support can include:<br><br>- Designing learning activities for students to undertake inside and outside class<br><br>- Helping students to manage, plan and review their learning and their approaches to study<br><br>- Explaining new concepts and methods<br><br>- Ensuring that students received, understand and use feedback on their work, from you and from other students<br><br>- Helping students to locate, judge and use appropriate learning resources |

## What makes a course good?[3]

Participants audited their courses against these principles, and explored how they could use these principles further.

*1. Encourages contacts between students and staff*

Staff-student contact in and out of class is vital in student motivation and involvement.

*2. Develops cooperation among students*

Working with others can increase involvement in learning, and hence the effectiveness of learning.

*3. Uses active learning techniques*

Students must talk and write about what they are learning, relate it, apply it.

*4. Emphasizes time on task*

Students should spend the maximum possible time doing the subject, better and better.

*5. Provides prompt, constructive, usable feedback*

Students need frequent opportunities to produce work and to receive feedback on their work.

*6. Communicates clear and high expectations*

Students are more likely to work well and succeed when they are clear what is expected of them.

*7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning*

Students need to learn in ways that work for them, and then be encouraged to learn in new ways.

## Making good use of staff and student time[4]

Participants used the principles above to explore which staff activities generated the most and best student learning per unit of staff time expended. Some conclusions:

• Design student learning activities, particularly those which encourage student cooperation;

• Make gradual rather than abrupt transitions in learning and teaching methods;

• Maximize student use of real-world resources;

• Make more use of self and peer student feedback;

• Establish and use clear course learning outcomes; and

• Continue to discuss with students (a) the qualities of good work in the discipline, (b) effective student learning activities and (c) effective staff support for student learning.

[1] Including Baume, D. (2011). **Course Design for Increased Student Satisfaction.** Belfast, Queens University Belfast

[2] See Baume, D. (2009). **Writing and Using Good Learning Outcomes.** Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University. **http://tinyurl.com/3a2whed** and.

[3] Adapted from Chickering, A. W. and S. C. Ehrmann (1996). "Implementing the seven principles: Technology as Lever." **AAHE Bulletin 49**(2): 3-6 *and* Chickering, A. W. and Z. F. Gamson (1987). Seven Principles For Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. **AAHE Bulletin.** Washington DC. **39**: 3-7.

[4] See Bates, I., D. Baume, et al. (2010). "Focusing on student learning to guide the use of staff time." **Innovations in Education and Teaching International 47**(4): 357-367.

# Education Strategy 2011-2016

By Professor Ellen Douglas-Cowie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students)

The University will soon launch its Education Strategy for 2011-2016. The Strategy sets an ambitious vision for the delivery of a transformational learning experience for students, thus distinguishing their employability and opportunities for life enhancement.

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with the Directors of Education over the past few months, during a time of great change in the external environment which will have a profound impact on teaching and learning, and the student experience, over the next five years. Recognising that there is a need for change if we are to fulfil our ambitions in the ever more competitive world that lies ahead, this Strategy signifies a number of bold new steps to further enhance the student academic and wider experience. In particular, we are seeking to develop our curriculum such that it:

- educates for a global world
- educates for new forms of employment
- is delivered flexibly to meet the changing needs of our students and the wider society

The Strategy has evolved under four themes: Dynamic and relevant curriculum; Student profile; Innovation and enrichment of teaching and support; Employability, entrepreneurship and citizenship in a global world.

## Dynamic and relevant curriculum

First and foremost, the University's curriculum must be intellectually challenging, internationally relevant, clearly informed by research and embed opportunities that enhance the future employability of our students and prepare them for a global environment. In reviewing and developing programmes, attention will be given to potential markets and costs of delivery in order to ensure their viability and sustainability.

## Student profile

The University seeks to attract students solely on the basis of their ability and potential to succeed within the learning environment that we offer. We will work in partnership with key stakeholders (local, national and international) to respond better to the current and future needs of our diverse student body and to ensure that their opportunities as graduates are enhanced by their student experience. Students are key to this partnership and we will continue to broaden their involvement in the design, delivery and assessment of their academic programmes, as full members of the Queen's community. The Strategy also recognises that the distinctiveness of individual students requires comprehensive learning, personal and social engagement if they are to take full advantage of the learning opportunities on offer.

## Innovation and enrichment of teaching and support

To maintain excellence and foster innovation in education, the Strategy seeks to encourage changes to curriculum delivery which will enable our students to learn in a more active and interactive way, supported by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and developments to the physical learning spaces. The University will identify opportunities to offer increased flexibility in patterns of study to meet the changing needs of students, where appropriate. We believe in encouraging the development of the whole person and will promote the wide range of sporting, social, cultural and community based activities available to students.

## Employability, entrepreneurship and citizenship in a global world

It is our business to produce graduates with discipline-specific knowledge and skills, distinctive attributes that are highly valued by employers and values of good citizenship, democracy and civic responsibility. These attributes include critical thinking, adaptability, intellectual flexibility, enquiry, capacity to challenge, an ability to work in teams, enterprise and entrepreneurship, business awareness and leadership. The University is committed to expanding opportunities for work-related learning and internationalisation as such experiences provide a further means of differentiation in the increasingly competitive graduate recruitment market. We are committed to developing active citizens who will contribute to and shape the ongoing development of an active, democratic and inclusive society. We strongly encourage the development of corporate social responsibility amongst our students and recognise the contributions they can make to the local, national and international community.

The Education Strategy is an articulation of what we, as an institution, plan to achieve. It is ambitious and challenging and its achievement will rely on the individual contribution of all who work here. Accordingly, over the past months, the Strategy has been re-iterated and refined as staff have debated and discussed it in various forums.

The Strategy will be presented to Academic Council for final approval in June 2011.

# Student Conference: Your Queen's Experience

By Alison Skillen and Nuala Toman, Centre for Educational Development

On Wednesday 23 February, the University and the Students' Union joined forces to run the first-ever **Your Queen's Experience Conference**, which was held in The Space in the Students' Union.

Organised by the Centre for Educational Development in collaboration with the Students' Union, 150 students, undergraduate and postgraduate, and 50 staff participated in discussions throughout the course of the day, filling the Space to capacity. The purpose of the conference was to give the University a deeper, more comprehensive and accurate picture of how students feel about their experience, and the discussion groups followed the key themes of the National Student Survey and institutional priorities:

1  **Your Assessment, Your Feedback, Your Progress:** Key Theme Assessment and Feedback

2  **Your Library, Your Resources, Your Learning Development:** Key theme Learning Resources

3  **Your Learning Experience:** Key theme Learning and Teaching

4  **Your Campus:** Key theme Organisation and Management

5  **Your Development:** Key theme Personal Development and Employability

6  **Your Postgraduate Taught Experience**

7  **Your Postgraduate Research Experience**

A total of 22 undergraduate and four postgraduate discussion groups, which were facilitated by specially trained student ambassadors, supported by staff, generated wide-ranging feedback and clear, concrete suggestions for improvement.

Discussions identified key areas of good practice across the University. These included, among others: the new library space, group approaches to personal tutoring, access to learning development support, examples of formative feedback and employability opportunities.

Suggestions for improvement included among others: a reduction of noise levels in the library, increasing access to resources across campus including computers and books, a reduction in large-scale lectures and an increase in formative approaches to feedback.

A report on the Conference outlining the student recommendations was discussed at the Supporting Student Attainment Working Group on 13th April and, arising from this, an action plan to address the recommendations will be developed. A web area outlining the outcomes from the Conference is currently under development.

Speaking about the conference, Professor Ellen Douglas-Cowie, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education and Students, said: *"The 'Your Queen's Experience Conference' has stimulated a dialogue between staff and students at Queen's. I was delighted with the high numbers of students and staff who participated in the day. There were a total of 26 discussions which reflected upon both the undergraduate and postgraduate experience at Queen's. Participants have outlined many interesting and useful recommendations which are both practical and strategic which will inform the new Education Strategy at Queen's."*

# The Senior Tutor Forum and Personal Tutoring Bulletin

by Eimear Gallagher, Centre for Educational Development

Personal Tutoring was introduced as part of the Student Employability and Skills Policy 2008-2011 in order to promote engagement between academic staff and their students in conversations aimed at encouraging higher levels of academic achievement and supporting retention.

The scheme was also mapped into the overall support that Queen's offers for Personal Development Planning (PDP) and includes a referral link to relevant student support services. As a means of promoting staff-student engagement and PDP, it has been noted that there has been an overall rise in the First and Second Year Experience Survey scores regarding the ability of students to contact staff when they needed to since Personal Tutoring was established. Personal Tutoring may not be the sole reason for this increase, but it seems reasonable to assume that it has been a contributing factor.

## Senior Tutor Forum 2011

The Senior Tutor Forum was established following an initial round of consultations between CED and representatives from Schools in 2009. It was felt that the Forum was an appropriate means by which Schools could compare their progress and practices, agree the strategies that are proving most effective in implementing the Personal Tutoring Scheme and discuss relevant issues being faced by Schools. As a result, the Forum now meets on an annual basis and 45 academics from 20 Schools and Associate Colleges attended the event in 2011.

It is notable that, as a general trend, Schools who have developed and communicated a clear structure around the general requirements outlined in the Personal Tutoring Handbook are showing most progress. Student surveys confirm reports of strong levels of student and staff engagement in these schemes. The Schools themselves commonly noted the importance of finding a clear purpose and reason for students and staff to engage with Personal Tutoring. The structure of their schemes have been refined over time (2-3 years) to reflect this purpose and staff have been allowed sufficient opportunity to gain familiarity with their role. Approaches that were proving successful in getting students to value meetings more included offering further general feedback related to one or more of the following;

1. A link to feedback e.g. through provision of more detailed breakdown of marks from coursework or examinations (Psychology, Chemistry)

2. The development of specific academic skills (e.g. Languages, Environmental Planning, Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering)

3. Work placement/Year Abroad preparations (e.g. Electrical Engineering)

4. Professional Body portfolios / requirements (e.g. Nursing, Pharmacy)
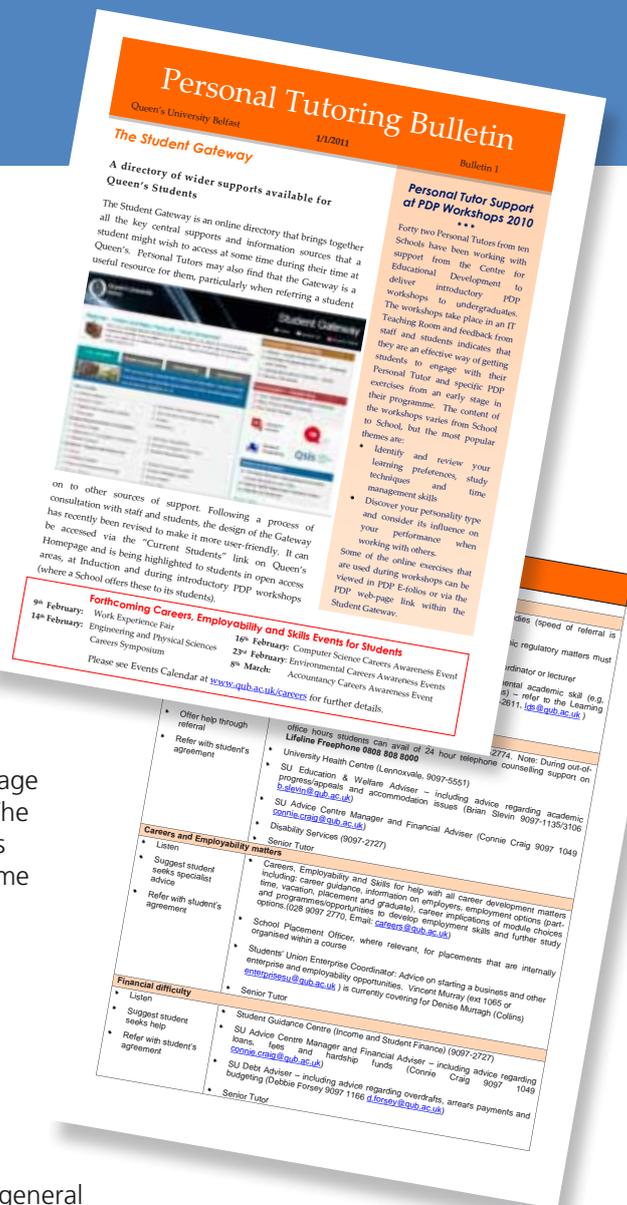
## Personal Tutoring Bulletin

In order to keep academics in touch with developments, a Personal Tutoring Bulletin has been produced, distributed to all Schools and published on the Personal Tutoring web-page (accessible via the Staff Gateway). It is intended to publish the bulletin in January and September each year and it will include a regular update of the Summary Referral Action Chart which Personal Tutors value as a means of providing them with an accessible and up-to-date summary of contact details for staff within services that they may need to refer their students to, from time to time.

# Internationalisation – impact on curriculum and teaching and learning strategies at Queen's

by Eimear Gallagher, Centre for Educational Development

**Learning in situations where diverse perspectives are fostered enables students to become better critical thinkers, better communicators, better problem solvers and better team players. Employer surveys confirm the importance of these behaviours.**

A high value is placed on graduates able to offer an international dimension as part of their degree and such experience provides a further means of differentiation in the increasingly competitive graduate recruitment market. The new Education Strategy which is under development has identified 'globally/internationally connected' as a key principle of the core and co-curriculum.

Since internationalisation is therefore high on the University's agenda, the question arises of how this is influencing teaching and the process of integrating an international dimension into the curriculum. The Centre for Educational Development (CED) has been talking to a number of academics about some of the internationalised learning experiences that they have already developed within courses. For some subject areas, such as Geography and Languages, internationalisation has always been a natural and logical part of the curriculum which they continue to develop for their students. For others, such as Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, it has evolved as part of the School's drive for higher levels of student achievement.

In order to gain a deeper insight into other types of curriculum and teaching innovations that Schools have adopted to bring an international dimension to the student learning experience, CED recently interviewed a number of staff from different subject areas and one Associate College. Among those interviewed were representatives from Geography, French and Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. These disciplines have established activities that capitalise on internationalised learning experiences and international research links. Perhaps the most radical approach is the substantial review and international benchmarking exercise taken by Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. This has involved a sustained programme that attempts to match curriculum and employer needs as part of the CDIO (Conceive, Design, Implement, Operate) initiative aimed at producing "a global engineer" (see http://www.cdio.org/). There has been extensive international academic peer review of the Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering programmes at Queen's plus a willingness to pool, share and facilitate fast-tracking of teaching and learning strategies that enhance the student learning experience and promote the development of the skills, attributes and experiences that are most valued by relevant employers.

The University also has a significant number of international staff and students who are its cultural capital and have much to contribute to the process of 'internationalisation at home' (there are over 600 international staff and around 1200 international students from more than 80 countries currently working or studying at Queen's). There are significant international student links and exchanges with 11 universities including the University of Kuala

## Typical International Teaching and Learning Themes

- **Global Warming**
- **Sustainability**
- **The Global Economy**
- **World Trade**
- **Historical International Links**
- **International Research Initiatives**
- **Poverty**
- **Human Migration**

- **International Justice and Law**
- **Multiculturalism/Cultural Diversity**
- **International Politics**
- **Global Ethics/ Global Citizenship**
- **Language**
- **Global and Cultural Health Issues**
- **Field Work Abroad**
- **Language Year (Residence) Abroad e.g. with work experience, as in French and Spanish**

Lumpur, Malaysia and Shenzhen University, China. The introduction of INTO as a recognised University College within Queen's adds a further international dimension and provides opportunities for "at home" experiences. As well as offering preparation courses for international students wishing to study at undergraduate or postgraduate level in the UK, INTO also offers tailored support programmes within Schools such as the provision of an "English for Engineers" course as a transitional support for postgraduate students in the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering. There is

also further potential for Schools and INTO to explore opportunities for language undergraduates or students with a study interest in a particular geographical region or culture to meet with student peers from countries such as Spain, Mexico or Japan. Such an initiative would equally benefit INTO students, helping them to integrate into local student life and the wider Queen's community.

CED is currently producing case studies from these interviews which will be made available as a resource for those with an interest in these concepts. The first case

study is also included in this issue of *'Reflections'* and provides an account of how the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology has formalised its Distinguished Visiting Scholar programme to include a mutually beneficial experience for researchers in the School, its students and the Scholar him/herself. This case study, along with those from French, Mechanical & Aerospace Engineering and one based on INTO's experience of teaching International students, will be uploaded as part of a series of resources onto CED's "Internationalising the Curriculum" web page.

Colleagues who have successfully integrated an international dimension into their teaching and are willing to provide information for a case study, are warmly invited to contact the Curriculum Development Team in CED, so that their good practice may be shared more widely across the University.

*(Thanks to Mr Paul Hermon, Dr Nigel Harkness, Professor Margaret Topping, Professor Steve Royle and Ms Rita Magee for their assistance in providing information for this article)*

# Internationalising the Curriculum

## Insights into the Distinguished Visiting Scholars Programme in Geography

By Eimear Gallagher, Centre for Educational Development

**The Distinguished Visiting Scholars Programme in Geography is a well established, formalised event held within a School that already draws heavily on internationalised teaching examples, experiences and field trips**

The School has sought out a number of synergies between its international research work and the teaching and learning experiences of its students. The Distinguished Visiting Scholars Programme is one obvious example

of this. The Programme is organised by the School's Society, Space and Culture Research Cluster. Each year one member of the cluster nominates an internationally esteemed research partner from another institution and arranges the visit. With the Cluster covering the costs for travel and accommodation, the researcher comes to Queen's for one or two weeks to interact with staff and students on site, and, more specifically, to work closely with one or more members of the cluster, on a common research interest. He/she is also asked to prepare a paper for presentation and discussion with the Human Geography Reading Group as a means of facilitating a broader exchange of ideas. In addition to this, significant opportunity is built in for final year and postgraduate students to meet with the visiting scholar, in one to one or small group formats. In this way, the Scholar can

also act as a mentor to postgraduates and to final year undergraduates with an interest in his or her area of research.



This year's Distinguished Visiting Scholar was Nicolaas Rupke, Professor of the History of Science at Göttingen University in Germany. The Centre for Educational Development spoke with Professor Rupke during his recent visit and asked him about his experience of the programme, the value of the visit from his own perspective and about his view of the student mentoring role that the Research Cluster had included as part of his remit.

Professor Rupke had attended a conference organised by the School of History and Anthropology at Queen's several years ago, so had previous experience of visiting the University. However, on this occasion, it was the ongoing research contact with Professor David Livingstone in Geography that was the key factor in his decision to accept the offer to be the Visiting Scholar in 2011. The programme is organised in a way that allowed Professor Rupke to present and discuss work relating to a book that he is currently writing and to further develop some of his current research work in a way that he found "extremely useful". There are other attractions in the programme at Queen's School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology. For example, the appointment as Visiting Scholar is a formalised role and is publicised on a website along with a list of previous Distinguished Scholars. It is, therefore, an appropriate experience for the researcher to add to their CV and will be recognised and understood as an honour by academic research peers in other institutions.

For Postgraduate Research students, in particular, the visit of a distinguished international researcher, like Professor Rupke, offers several significant opportunities to engage with an authority who can view their work and overall development from a more detached perspective. Students are encouraged to discuss their work with the Visiting Scholar during one to one "drop- in" sessions. Seminars provided opportunity for students to gain an understanding of some of Rupke's previous work and to engage in dialogue on areas that were relevant to their own projects. In addition to the meetings and seminars, which are timetabled in as part of the visit, there are informal opportunities for students to talk with the Visiting Scholar in a more relaxed context such as an evening social event. Professor Rupke felt that these occasions often provided the best opportunities for broader and more honest discussion about the student's research project and their longer term aspirations. Students were found to be more open and willing to seek advice on the aspects of their research project that they were concerned about in the less formal settings. These conversations also presented opportunities for the Visiting Scholar

## Distinguished Visiting Scholars

### The Scheme:

The Visiting Scholar Scheme was established some years ago to enable eminent scholars from outside of the UK to be invited to visit the School for a period of one or two weeks. These distinguished academics have interacted with staff on research matters, delivered a seminar in the School, and taken on a few other duties such as presenting one or two lectures to undergraduate classes and meeting with post-graduate students.

### 2011 SSC Distinguished Visiting Scholar:

Our visiting scholar this academic year is Nicolaas Rupke who will be at Queen's from Monday 14 March to Friday 18 March. Nicolaas is Lower Saxony Research Professor of the History of Science at Göttingen University. His areas of expertise are the late modern earth and life sciences. Among his books are Alexander von Humboldt: A Metabiography (2008) and Richard Owen: Biology without Darwin (2009). He is currently working on the non-Darwinian tradition in evolutionary biology. Rupke is a fellow of the German Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the Göttingen Academy of Sciences, where he directs the project "Blumenbach Online."

to offer suggestions on how to widen their research networks and prioritise their activities etc.

In terms of further potential learning experiences which could evolve from the Distinguished Visiting Scholars visits, Professor Rupke has not yet been involved in a student exchange between Gottingen University and Queen's. However, there have been Erasmus-based exchanges with the University of Edinburgh, and this was

a further internationalised learning experience that could potentially evolve from this programme.

*(Thanks to Professor Rupke for his time and comments. Thanks also to Professor Steve Royle and Dr Diarmid Finnegan from the School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology for their assistance in providing background material for this article and arranging for the meeting with Professor Rupke)*

# Promoting Employability Through a Year Abroad (Languages)

By Eimear Gallagher, Centre for Educational Development

In considering models of an internationalised curriculum, Languages presents an obvious example of an area that has been developing and refining a range of experiences over a considerable period of time. Apart from "on-site" experiences, the Year Abroad

between Stage 2 and 3 is a major component of the BA for Languages students and accounts for 10% of the marks which contribute towards the Degree Classification. In recent years, Languages have added employability enhancement as a central skill, and this is built into core modules in Level 2. The experience of having to live and work abroad on their own promotes independence and inter-cultural awareness and understanding in a way that on-site learning cannot. It also equips the student to compete in a global society that values the graduate who can meet personal challenges, embrace change and confidently adapt to

multicultural workplaces and social situations. Lecturers also benefit from the investment of their time in organising the Year Abroad as most students return to study (at Stage 3) demonstrating more maturity, showing increased levels of initiative taking and higher levels of motivation towards their studies.

Preparation for the Year Abroad has been developed to enable students to enhance and articulate their professional skills and employability profiles, as well as the linguistic competence which would be expected to be a central part of this experience. The promotion of employability has been achieved by encouraging students to work as opposed to study abroad (typically working as a Language Teaching Assistant) and including a requirement to provide documentation relating to their job application and complete an oral examination (in the target language) in the form of a job interview (at Queen's) before embarking on their overseas experience. During their year abroad, students are also required to formally reflect on their personal development by maintaining a learning journal. On returning to Queen's, they complete a 3000 word reflective report and have a 30 minute oral exam in which questions focus particularly on skills development in four core areas (linguistic competence, cultural/inter-cultural awareness, experience of the world of work, and personal development).

For most students, this compulsory activity is a major step in their personal experience of independent living and presents a significant challenge. It is seen as a transformational experience that allows students to appreciate other cultures and values, to enhance their language skills and to challenge themselves academically and personally in an environment that is often outside their comfort zone. Succeeding in doing this promotes maturity, problem solving and critical thinking skills among students. The preparation also provides a useful focal point for engaging students in wider developmental conversations with their Personal Tutor and it helps undergraduates to take a longer term view of their development beyond the next few months.

In January 2011, the British Academy released a position paper entitled "Language matters more and more" which points to the strategic importance of languages in an increasingly globally positioned economy at a time when the number of students studying languages at school is in decline.

abroad for 7-9 months, it is common for their graduates to travel and work abroad during the year after completion of their Degree. They also benefit from the increased motivation that comes from the maturing and confidence-building experience of the year abroad; students become more focused on their academic

> **"** *In 2010, 57% of pupils were taking no language at GCSE. While the total number of A-level candidates for all subjects has risen by 24% since 1996, the number of candidates for languages in the same period has fallen by 25%.......language provision (is) now mainly located in pre-1992 universities, and in the Russell Group universities in particular.* **"**

Providing opportunities for undergraduates to enhance their employability and engage with experiences outside Northern Ireland is an important feature of Languages degrees at Queen's. The increased emphasis on working abroad, as well as the cultural and linguistic development opportunities, helps to ensure that students are able to practise and receive feedback on their ability to communicate this experience effectively to others. Academics in the School believe that the experience has also proven to be a very effective tool in countering insularity and note that, having lived and worked

performance on their return in Level 3 and engage more effectively in tutorials and other teaching and learning activities.

### References

British Academy (Jan 2011) Language Matters More and More, Available at: http://www.britac.ac.uk/policy/Language-matters-more-and-more.cfm (Accessed: 24th March 2011).

*Thanks to Dr Nigel Harkness and Professor Margaret Topping for their assistance in providing information for this Case Study.*

# Languages, Skills and Employability: Educating for Global Potential

By Dr Fiona Clark, Languages, Literatures and Performing Arts

BMW's HR Director, Bob Shankly stated this month that: "Employees with language skills are definitely more marketable and have a greater worth in the labour market."[1] In the current economic circumstances, few people could be unaware of the challenges facing young people as they prepare for study and future employment.

Whilst this is a challenge that confronts all subject areas, formulating the link between study and employment is often considered to be a more difficult task for Humanities subjects perceived to lack the explicit vocational connections available to other areas.

Modern Languages at Queen's is rising to this challenge in a number of ways: module delivery and design, work placement schemes at home and abroad, and through enhanced collaboration with potential employers. Most recently, in January 2011, Languages held their annual AS level Study Days for students of French, Irish and Spanish, bringing together some 600 students and teachers from across Northern Ireland. Whilst primarily focused on specific skills related to language learning within the broad structures of the AS curricula, a key session centred on the link between the skills in language degrees and their potential impact on career pathways [See table 1].

These sessions had two main goals: first, to encourage young people to 'think big' and seek to recognise their global potential, especially in the broad range of careers open to those who are multi-lingual; second, to raise awareness that language learning far exceeds a focus on words and their equivalents; and that core value lies in developing the ability to understand all aspects of other cultures, thereby gaining a portfolio of soft skills that are in high demand by employers. Charles Macleod, Head of UK Resourcing, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, would concur: 'The value of [a student's] international experience goes beyond purely the acquisition of language - it lies in the ability to see business and personal issues from other than your own cultural perspective."[2]

As a means of underscoring the practical application of these opportunities, each subject area invited a number of graduates to share their experiences with the students, highlighting, on a personal level, how the skills they had developed whilst studying languages at Queen's proved to be foundational in their later career paths. Spanish and Portuguese Studies were delighted to welcome participation by Darlene McCormick, Northern Ireland Business Woman of the Year (2010), and Hilary Oliver, Managing Director of the Mayfair-based Radio, Film and Press Consultants, Cameo Productions Ltd,. leader of on-air film promotion. Each contributor emphasised the formative experience of their time as language undergraduates and how, as employers, these skills continue to play an important role in today's market.

As Darlene McCormick stressed, "Language graduates have a developed sense of communication, problem solving and analytical skills as well as a wide and cultured education. Those qualities in themselves are attractive to any employer. Many executive posts in the European Union and further afield will require Spanish or another language, making the study of languages even more attractive for graduates". In addition to the embedded skills within modules, the placement opportunities on the year abroad provide ample scope for personal development, growth of independence, and career experience.

Speaking from the perspective of the creative industries, Hilary Oliver drew attention to this fact stating



Back row – David McDermott, Erin McCombe, Sarah Morrison (Foyle and Londonderry College), **Front row** – Louise Greer (British Council), Hilary Oliver (Cameo Productions), Gilliam Herron (St Cecilia's College)

that, "As an employer of mainly young people in a creative and fast moving industry I tend to look out for people with proven linguistic skills". Amongst these skills she highlighted the formation of a thorough absorption of another culture, and improved communication skills, in both their own language and the target language. She added that "These attributes are essential in film promotion, e.g. writing press releases, and in all daily communication with clients, filmmakers, actors and journalists. Being able to pronounce correctly the name of a foreign film is a perceived courtesy and the mark of a cultured person".

It is hardly surprising then that a recent poll commissioned by the National Centre for Languages found that 'languages came second only to IT in a list of desirable skills for job candidates. One in four (43%) recruiters say speaking a second language gives a candidate the x-factor when applying for a job'.[3]

Clearly, Modern Languages have a key role to play in any centre of academic excellence seeking to develop skills that are central to the global community in which we live and work. Helping students to look beyond the borders of their own country and to develop full intercultural competency will remain a central character of language degrees achieved through a framework of practical skills development throughout the degree pathway.

[1] Katie Nicholls, 'Boost your employability: learn a language', Totaljobs.com, April 2011. **http://www.totaljobs.com/careers-advice/training-centre/learning-languages** [accessed 2/4/2011]

[2] Charles Macleod, quoted in 'Graduate employability: what do employers think and want?', (Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), February 2008), **http://www.cilt.org.uk/home/policy/policy_articles_listing/graduate_employability.aspx** [accessed 2/4/2011]

[3] 'Foreign language skills make jobseekers more employable during recession', PersonnelToday, February 2010, **http://www.personneltoday.com/articles/2010/02/25/54404/foreign-language-skills-make-jobseekers-more-employable-during-recession.html** [accessed 3/4/2011]

## Table 1: Examples of Embedded and General Employability Skills across the Language Degrees

**Language Skills:**

- Translation
- Grammar competency
- Oral communication
- Comprehension
- Listening comprehension
- Summary writing
- Report writing
- Essay writing
- Computer based language learning skills
- Ability to work within a range of language registers

**Research and content-based skills:**

- Literary Analysis
- Linguistic Analysis
- Cultural Analysis
- Experience in the use of a wide ranging variety of documents
- Referencing skills
- Literary and cultural theory
- Specialist training in use of library and research resources

**Embedded skills:**

- Advanced writing skills
- Critical thinking
- Team working
- Note-taking techniques
- Presentation Skills (inc. use of Power Point)
- Group work skills
- Time Management
- Interpersonal skills
- Oral communication
- Leadership in group work
- Problem solving
- Computer literacy
- Independence
- Problem solving
- Reflective learning skills
- Independent study

**Specialised Applied Language Skills course:**

- CV writing and Cover letters in target language
- Use of target language in employment opportunities and business environments
- Interview skills and specific language for interview purposes
- Practice job interviews
- Creation of business plans
- Development of business acumen
- Knowledge of business diversity across the countries of target language
- Specialised language skills for legal translation

**Living and Working Abroad:**

- Financial management
- Independent Living skills
- Managing official documents
- TEFL training
- Training by British Council abroad
- Work experience (teaching, business, banking or other)
- Study abroad (law, science, humanities)

# What's the Risk?
# Considering approaches to supporting vulnerable students

By Kara Baillie, Head of Student Welfare

Supporting achievement of our most vulnerable students is a key concern for many institutions. At Queen's University Belfast the *Student Care Protocol* provides a defined process for identifying, acting and following-up on concerns about students' wellbeing, offering co-ordinated support across support services, and increasingly working with academic Schools.

## A picture of student wellbeing

At Queen's, 2009-10 saw a 30% increase in the number of students attending the Counselling Service, and a 43% increase in the number of students registering with mental health disabilities. However, it is the manifestation of mental health difficulties – which may be a temporary reaction to an event, stress or pressure or a long-term psychiatric condition –when they are not being managed and supported that can cause problems in the University environment.



## Support that crosses boundaries

In 2008, the University convened a 'Students at Risk' Working Group. The Group established a set of indicators for student vulnerability, and envisioned a protocol that would ensure the most vulnerable students received additional care to support their academic progression and achievement. This has become the *Student Care Protocol.*

Primarily the Protocol ensures that support services act consistently and in an integrated way. Representatives from Disability, Counselling, Students' Union, Occupational Health, Accommodation and Community Affairs meet fortnightly during semester to address incidents, issues or raise concerns about students. This is done confidentially and with utmost concern for student wellbeing. A Lead Contact is assigned, who contacts the student, and works with them to agree a package of support, including University services and external agencies. The Lead Contact works with the student until the student indicates that their support is no longer required or the matters

causing concern have been resolved. Students are encouraged to speak to their academic department about their situation, or the Lead Contact may do this on their behalf.

Working across support services has enabled Queen's to take a holistic approach to student support needs, and provides a mechanism for proactively contacting a student to offer support - attempting to prevent a difficult situation from becoming a threat to academic progress.

The Student Care Forum has been particularly effective in linking international students to the full range of support, and has also identified trends in groups of students requiring additional support, such as first year students coming to Belfast from Great Britain and students returning after a period of temporary withdrawal. It has created a way to address concerns about wellbeing raised through formal processes, such as discipline. Feedback from students expressed gratitude for the interest taken in their wellbeing by the University, and increased awareness of support available to all students.

**First year of operation: how concerns about students were identified:**



| Category | NI | International | GB | ROI |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Contact initiated by a parent/guardian/carer | 2 | | | |
| Information provided pre-entry to ensure support in place | | 1 | | |
| School raised concerns | 2 | | | 1 |
| Support area – Personal situation/concerns for wellbeing | 5 | 4 | 1 | |
| Incident causing concern | 4 | | 4 | |
| Disciplinary/Conduct process | 4 | | | |
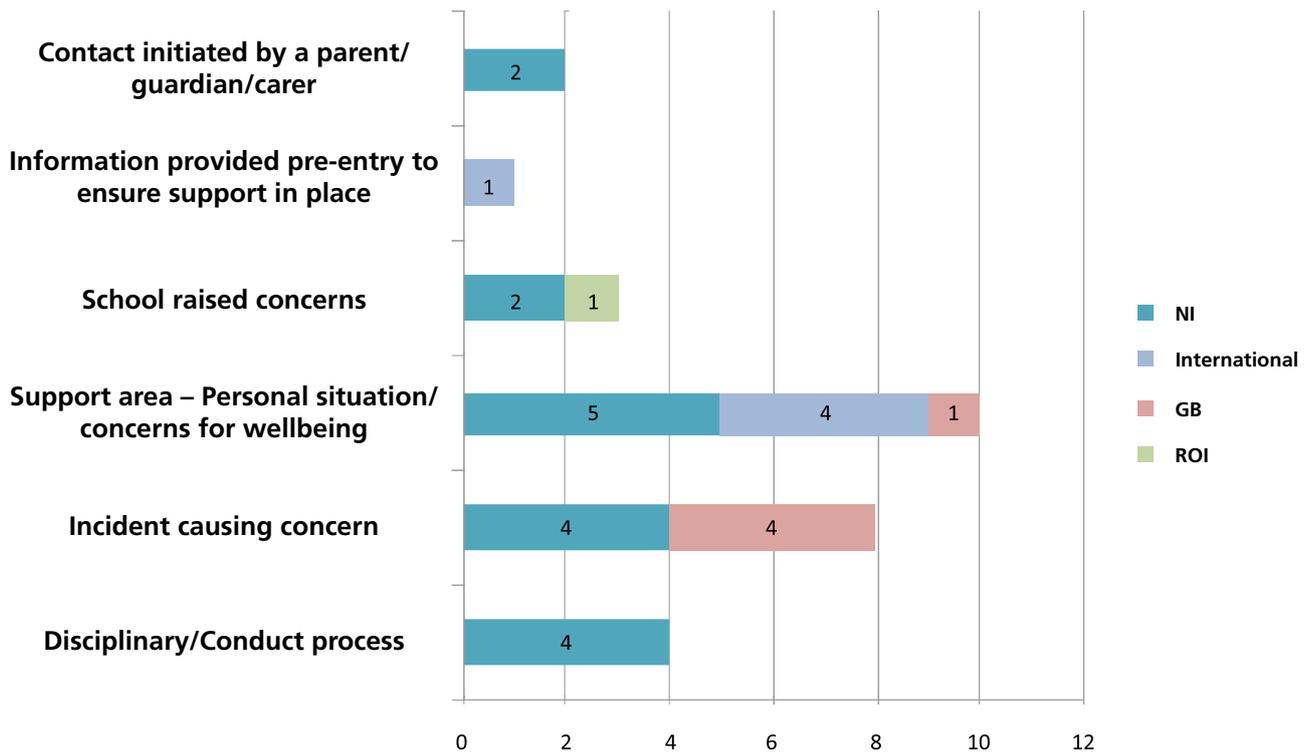
*"Since receiving help from Community Affairs, Students' Union and Student Welfare, things have really turned around for me…What I have learned from such a terrible situation is that, the University is not out to get you, and there are many people who have your best interests at heart and will go the extra mile to help. I'm glad I didn't have to go it alone, and I was able to receive help and advice on my problems."* 2nd year Management student

## Limits of Reasonableness

One of the less tangible impacts of a student facing serious difficulties is the impact on staff. The Care Protocol recognizes this in two ways. First of all, staff in support services are sharing difficult decisions and talking through actions, enhancing the management and mitigation of risk. Secondly, staff are more informed about student situations, with case discussions and joint problem-solving helping staff to feel less isolated in handling complex student situations.

*"Over the last eighteen months QUB Student Welfare has been coordinating the support that we have received on a particular challenging and saddening case. This case was perhaps the most distressing that I have encountered in my thirteen years as a member of QUB staff…I found, as did my colleagues, that the advice and support given to us through those [case] meetings and the associated outcomes was genuinely uplifting and invaluable…knowing help is on hand, a call or email away, is comforting and relieves us from much of the stress and concerns that would otherwise arise, permitting us to engage in an informed way with the student."*
*Alan Jones, Director of Education, Architecture.*

As many institutions are struggling with the legal and ethical issues relating to 'Fitness to Study', the Student Care Protocol has established a model at Queen's for student-focussed support interventions. It recognizes that early intervention and effective support requires a full picture of student difficulties with an integrated approach from the University, and increasingly, external agencies. Students who have experienced significant difficulties are offered support to get back on track, knowing there is a caring University community behind them. It has also highlighted the limitations on what support a University community can provide. Our duty of care applies equally to all students and staff, and a perceived sense of responsibility for assisting one student cannot compromise this for others. There are limits to what is reasonable for the University, and particularly individual members of staff, to provide in a higher education environment. The important lesson is about being clear in how we set the expectation of support to students.

# Supporting the Development of World Class Researchers: The Researcher Development Framework

By Heather McGregor, Senior Postgraduate Officer (Training), IPSC and Paul Monahan, STDU

The Researcher Development Framework (RDF) is a new approach to developing Researcher Careers within the Higher Education Sector and acts in support of The Concordat to Support the Career Development of Research Staff[1], the QAA Code of Practice for research degree programmes[2] and the 'Roberts'[3] recommendations for postgraduate researchers and research staff.

The purpose of the Framework is to develop world class researchers and build the UK research base. Researchers, and those who support their development, can use the RDF to evaluate and plan personal, professional and career development.

The framework (Figure 1) is structured into 4 domains which suggest the type of knowledge, behaviours and attitudes that will assist researchers in undertaking their research.

A working group has been established at Queen's to consider how the Framework should be implemented. A gap analysis has been carried out which compares current training and development provision for Postgraduate Research Students and Research Staff with that outlined in the Framework.

**Figure 1.**



Engagement, influence and impact
The knowledge and skills to work with others and ensure the wider impact of research.
Domain D

Knowledge and intellectual abilities
The knowledge, intellectual abilities and techniques to do research.
Domain A

Domain C

Research governance and organisation
The knowledge of the standards, requirements and professionalism to do research.

Domain B

Personal effectiveness
The personal qualities and approach to be an effective researcher.

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For more information on the Researcher Development Framework and associated Statement go to **www.vitae.ac.uk/rdf**.

To feedback your thoughts on the framework and its implementation at Queen's, please e-mail Heather McGregor, International and Postgraduate Centre (**h.mcgregor@qub.ac.uk**) or Paul Monahan (**p.monahan@qub.ac.uk**), Staff Training and Development Unit.

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[1] www.researchconcordat.ac.uk

[2] www.qaa.ac.uk

[3] http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http:/www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/set_for_success.htm

# Using the Podcast to Teach Irish Traditional Music

By Dr Martin Dowling, School of Music and Sonic Arts

I was intrigued when the "Media Enhanced Learning Special Interest Group" came to Queen's in January 2010 to run an event entitled "Podcasting for Pedagogic Purposes." I teach modules on the history and practice of Irish traditional music on the BMus degree in the School of Music and Sonic Arts.

In these modules students engage with a vast repertoire of traditional music, and develop analytical and critical listening and writing skills as they come to an appreciation of style and historical context. One aspect of that context is the entire history of recorded media, from 18th and 19th century broadsides and printed collections, to the successive generations of sound recording technologies (from the wax cylinder, to the 78 rpm disc, to later vinyl formats, to the CD and other less resilient digital formats), up to the contemporary virtualized and socialised digital media. Like so many other spheres of cultural life, traditional Irish music is being transformed by YouTube, iTunes, Facebook, miniaturized recording and playback devices, and by information rich websites such as **thesession.org**, **mudcat.org**, and numerous archives rapidly digitizing and uploading the printed and sonic past. I routinely draw on this material and these media in lecture presentations and tutorial discussions. I wanted to know what more could be done within this digital environment to enhance student learning and satisfaction. Like most, I had a habit of passively consuming podcasts without considering their possible uses in the module learning environment.
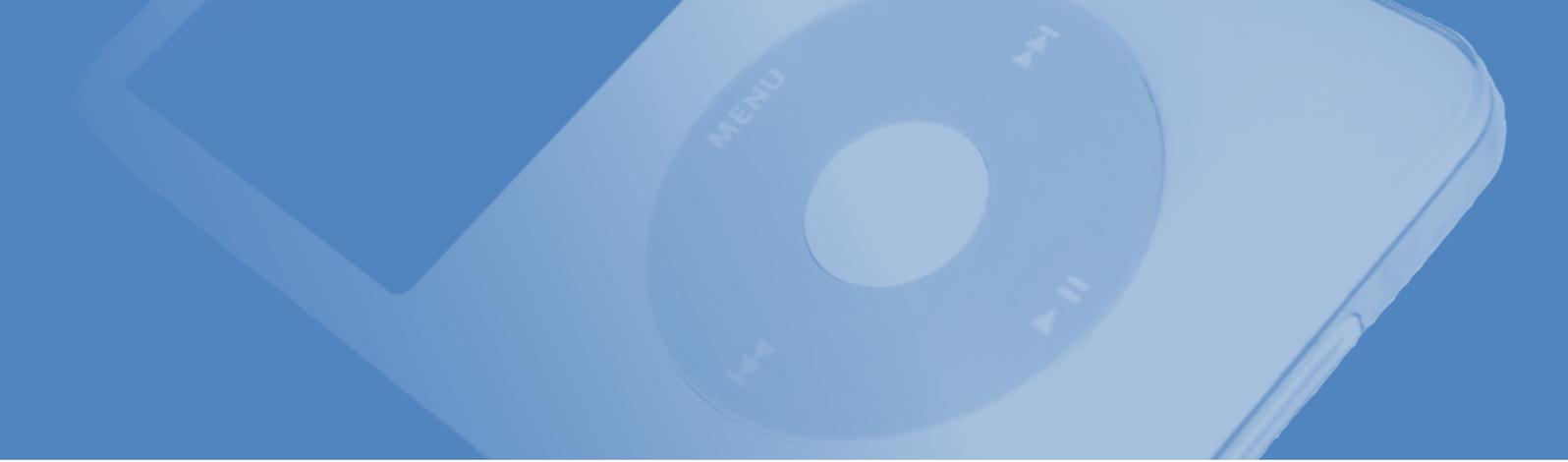
The event, which was followed up by a useful online course delivered by Queen's CED on "Using Audio to Enhance Teaching and Learning," provided all I needed and more. Educational podcasting is growing in popularity, and there are useful examples of innovative practice in virtually every academic discipline. The short audio podcast, designed to converge with other module resources, can enhance the learning experience in a variety of ways. It can provide context and structure or, alternatively, enriching case studies or exploration of specific problems. The format is best used to punctuate, condense, and repackage module content and disseminate it in a restyled mode, rather than to substitute for the lecture or reading. The technical aspects of making a podcast are surprisingly straightforward, even for those who are not used to the sound recording and mixing environment. A laptop with a microphone and an afternoon familiarising yourself with freely downloadable software for recording and mixing are all that you need. There is of plenty good advice on podcast design, and a worldwide web full of examples of good practice. Dealing with the time constraint of five to fifteens minutes is a challenge. The benefits of the podcast are heightened by serialisation, and consistency of style and design are important across the series. In my experience, strong podcasts begin with a punchy opening that provokes, invites, or challenges the listener (about contested issues, sources, specific problems), continue with some context for that opening invitation, and then incorporate multiple voices (in dialogue or offering alternative perspectives) as the content develops.

Lecturers, who, like me, are relatively fresh from PGCHET training, understand the importance of breaking the old habit of monopolising content delivery and expecting students to sit back and passively consume. Yet the repertoire of techniques for liberating the "active learner" in the classroom is, in my experience, a stale one. Students are in danger of what might be called death-by-breakout-session— pairing up with a partner today, and working in a team tomorrow, week in and week out. Having got a taste of this podcasting business, it occurred to me almost immediately that the podcast might be even more effective if the students themselves created and shared podcasts relating to module learning outcomes. In MUS2069 Irish Music: Origins and Trajectories students sit a final exam (70% of assessment) and submit a research project (30% of assessment). Traditionally

the project has been a 3,000 word research essay on a subject related to the historical learning outcomes of the module, to be agreed with the convenor. In the last two years, I have offered a 10-15 minute podcast with a shorter write-up as an option. In the write-up underpinning the podcast, students are given the opportunity to demonstrate that they have conducted research commensurate with the full research essay, as well as reflecting on their engagement with the literature on podcast design and the particular problems they faced. The option is underpinned by tutorials in podcast design and students "pitching" their ideas to the lecturer and each other.

Because of the wealth of audio content in the module, and the facility of most of the students for performance and recording techniques, the podcast has been a popular and appropriate choice. The best work has featured the student's own instrumental or vocal performance, and/or judiciously sampled and discussed music from relevant discographies. It has been enriching for me to open up this new form of assessment and witness students grapple with the different challenges of condensation and presentation posed by the podcast format. It is not every student's choice, and that too is appropriate. Indeed I am delighted that a minority are firmly committed to the more traditional written research project. It may not suit every module, but in my experience the podcast has widened the palette of music students by offering a new format for thinking, reflecting, and presenting their research.

Further information is available from:

Media Enhanced Learning SIG: **http://ppp.chester.ac.uk/index.php?title=Main_Page**

100 Ideas for Podcasting: **http://ppp.chester.ac.uk/index.php?title=100%2B_ideas_for_Podcasting**

Apple on podcasting: **http://www.apple.com/education/podcasting/**

and

**http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts/specs.html**

Podcasting at the University of Wisconsin: **http://engage.wisc.edu/podcasting/**

# Emotions: a new discussion forum

By Dr Amit Desai and Dr Barbara Graham, School of History and Anthropology

Postgraduate students and staff at the School of History and Anthropology have recently started an exciting new forum called 'Researching Objects-Images-Emotions' (ROIE). With twelve participants, the group meets every three weeks and provides an experimental space for discussion about the social lives of objects and images and the emotional dimensions of cultural production.

Research students whose work is partly focused on objects, images and/or emotional processes are encouraged to come along to the forum where they will have the opportunity to present and discuss their research.

**Paul McCreary,** a PhD candidate in social anthropology, said of the Forum:

*"Participation in the ROIE Forum is an excellent source of stimulation in pursuing and widening research interests. The inter-disciplinary make-up of the group generates thought-provoking discussion on topics, objects and the feelings they create which bring to light productive ways of looking at my own material with fresh eyes."*

A recent graduate of the School, **Dr Noomi Mozard** said:

*"I decided to participate in ROIE because of my research interest in emotions; the role emotions play in our daily lives, impacting strongly on how we perceive and value the world around us. I was also interested to pursue further the link we, as humans, feel to objects and how this can be expressed in different ways, something that has come up in my own research. It is a great initiative and an exciting opportunity to be part of a wider network."*

ROIE was established under the auspices of the Creativity and Innovation in a World of Movement (CIM) project which is funded by Humanities in the European Research Area (HERA) and involves researchers from Belfast, Manchester, Oslo and Amsterdam. It also has links with the Cultural Dynamics and Emotions Network (CDEN, see link below). At the CIM conference held at Belfast in March, ROIE circulated a pamphlet 'Objects and stories' which offered personal meditations on the forum participants' relationship to particular objects. The pamphlet also detailed their research interests and this led to fruitful discussions about possible collaborations across institutions.

Members of ROIE are currently formulating ideas for two projects. One is an autumn conference to be held at Queen's and another is an experimental workshop that will involve novel ways of exploring our relationships with objects and images, and in which participants will produce a communal work in various media to illustrate their ideas. It is hoped that this can be linked to other projects funded by HERA to create a truly collaborative network.

Project leader of CIM, ROIE participant, and Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, **Dr Maruska Svasek** said:

*"We have had five meetings so far during which we have discussed all sort of issues, ranging from research methods and theories of material culture to our own feelings about personal possessions. The range of research topics, including for example musical instruments, hunting trophies, works of art, museum exhibitions and the material belongings of migrant groups, makes our intellectual exchange particularly exciting."*

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Dr Barbara Graham:
**bgraham04@qub.ac.uk**

For more information about CIM please contact
Dr Maruska Svasek:
**m.svasek@qub.ac.uk**

CDEN:
**http://www.qub.ac.uk/cden/**

# Stage One Teaching in Architecture

By Dr Sarah Lappin and Professor Ruth Morrow, School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering

Teaching architecture at Stage One in any context is a challenge. This is due to many issues including large cohorts, a need for significant amount of resource-heavy skills teaching, the personal intensity required of students and an unfamiliarity of the territory – there is no A level in architecture. Over the last two years (2009-2011) the Stage One team has adopted a multi-pronged approach to address these challenges.

## Skill-led development

Whilst architecture is an intellectual discipline, it relies heavily on a range of skills: drawing, model-making, writing, team-working, managing schedules, etc. Architecture attracts academically able students whose intellectual capabilities initially exceed their skills. This disparity can create self-doubt, impacting on their connection to the course. The Stage One team aim to make the students conscious of this gap, investing in skill-based teaching early to increase students' capabilities, whilst simultaneously reinforcing students' responsibility in their own skill development.

This pedagogical intent was made manifest in:

• a fundamental redesign of all skill based modules in both semesters to include elements of self-assessment;

• staffing resources re-directed towards skill development and teaching targeted at those with greatest need;

• modules altered to emphasise the student responsibility in 'practising' and evidencing development of skills.

## Real Spaces/Real People/ Real Need

Students typically fare better in their educational development when they are motivated by 'a need to learn'. There is a drive in Stage One architecture to link learning to real situations including:

• more projects being set in the 'real' world beyond south Belfast, including the Cathedral Quarter, south County Down, County Antrim, Sandy Row;

• the development of Street Society, "a one week design research office, providing an opportunity for 1st year MArch and BSc architecture students to work together on a real project for a real client in real time." External organisations submit projects for student groups to work on over one week; clients have included Belfast City Council, community and arts groups. The level of student engagement is remarkable, and structured reflection sessions after the project indicate strong learning experiences. **http://streetsociety.ning.com**.

## Group working and collective outcomes

The practice of architecture is collaborative in nature.  However, traditionally we teach/assess students as individuals. This anomaly is frequently discussed within the professional bodies but rarely addressed in universities. Aware of the issues in terms of assessing group work, the Stage One team felt that it was worth instituting full group work in semester one.

Thus all design work in the Autumn semester is carried out and presented by groups of two to six students. It significantly reduces assessment/ feedback loads and supports students in the first stage of becoming a designer. Sharing this transition experience with others seems to boost confidence and design outcomes. Team conflicts arise, but this is supported by team-working theory input.

In the early stages, students produce work which they perceive as 'raw' which can undermine their

acknowledgement of personal development. Opportunities have, therefore, been created to build a collective sense of achievement.

Examples include:

- 'Shelf City' in which students worked in groups of two designing 1:50 living units to slot into a larger super-structure incorporating all 40 units. The final mega-model is very impressive;
- 'Street Society' in which all project teams presented their work in spaces outside the University to a receptive audience of staff, students and clients.

## More focused learning objectives, assessment and feedback

Understanding of learning objectives, assessment and feedback is paramount in architecture, particularly in stage one where there is a need to construct and manage a learning environment, allowing students to achieve excellence.  Hence:
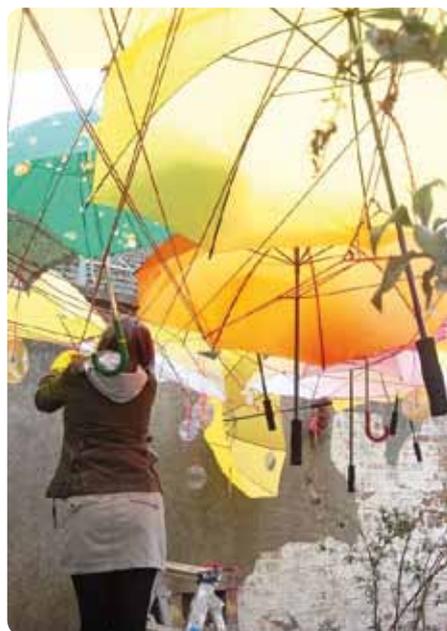


- all project briefs have been re-designed to build learning outcomes from one project to the next;
- a limited set of priorities is identified for each project and
- learning objectives are mapped tightly to assessment criteria and outcomes are constrained to match timescales and logistics.

## Addressing Retention

We have made a concerted effort to ensure students move confidently into later years of study.  Two architecture initiatives developed to address the issue of retention are:

- induction week for incoming students to introduce them to Belfast, university life, the School, each other and students from other years. The week combines the usual information sessions with interactive activities such as group design projects and architectural tours and

- The Retention Project funded from the Widening Participation Policy Group, supported the development of website aimed at year 13/14 pupils considering studying architecture **http://no15arch. wordpress.com**.

### Conclusion

These initiatives have also been supported by management decisions, such as an increase in entry requirements and reduction in cohort size, which has allowed each student to have an individual working space in our recently renovated design studios. We have seen progression and achievement rates increase considerably in Stage One due, we think, to all of these efforts, and we hope to continue to build on these advances in coming years.

# Adding an International Dimension to the Student Experience

by Deirdre Deery, Careers, Employability and Skills

**Students have, from their induction in the first few weeks of starting their academic career at Queen's, the opportunity to get involved in and engage with a wide variety of opportunities to enhance their student experience.**

Adding an international dimension takes this a stage further where students are in a position to not only experience new cultures and gain a global outlook but also develop valuable personal, career management and employability skills.

Each year over 600 students avail of the opportunity to undertake a study or work related experience outside Northern Ireland. The range of experiences include:

- British Council programmes including Language assistants, IAESTE (International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience) and Study USA;
- International Office providing support and advice to enable students to undertake work and study placement opportunities including Erasmusm one year and one semester programmes and university exchange opportunities;
- US Intern programme: Project Children and Washington Ireland programmes provide an invaluable opportunity to spend a summer working in the US in an internship linked to academic discipline;
- Vacation opportunities with employing organisations or volunteer groups.

In many cases current students do not realise the opportunities are open to a wide range of academic disciplines and therefore do not



**Case study on IAESTE Tokyo,by Gareth Robinson (Final year, MEng in Electrical and Electronic Engineering)**

*The decision to spend my summer in Japan was pretty easy, and went something along the lines of "that's the furthest away I can get". I first heard about the opportunities provided by IAESTE and the British Council by putting my email address down at the stand they had at the Autumn careers fair 2009, and it seemed like in no time at all I had landed myself a research post at the University of Tokyo.*

*The experience I gained with this internship was truly life changing. The organisation and time invested with me by my professor was far above any expectation I had, and yes, although language barrier posed a problem on a day-to-day basis (nobody understands Norn Irish…) the chance to work with students of such a high calibre was an amazing opportunity.*

*But IAESTE isn't just about technical experience, it's a cultural exchange also. And I still think about my time in Japan almost every day, from the strange (cat cafes), to the cultural (temple, after temple, after temple in Kyoto) to the sobering (Peace Museum in Hiroshima), I really couldn't think of a better way to spend a summer. I honestly couldn't think of a better way to spend a few months, at all. As a University student, the opportunity to do something like this is practically handed to you on a plate. And if you do it, you'll meet a lot more people than you think you will, have great friends from all over the world, and come back just a little bit better a person.*

consider applying. To combat this, and to bring all opportunites together, Careers, Employability and Skills earlier this year hosted a careers fair with an international dimension. It is envisaged that this will be an annual event with the next one planned for November 2011. The Careers, Employability and Skills website (**www.qub.ac.uk/careers**) currently includes details of opportunities covering:

- Opportunities for study or work overseas within Degree programme;
- Opportunity for Study or work overseas;
- Summer schemes;
- Student Societies.

**Case Study on Study USA**
**BEI: A Dream Fulfilled by Graham Cromie (3rd Year Law)**

*The BEI programme is a great opportunity for any individual to challenge themselves in all sorts of environments and to immerse themselves in a 'melting pot' of culture. For myself, it was joining the golf team, writing for the school paper, giving speeches on Northern Ireland and eventually running a hostel in New York City; but whatever your taste, the many doors that swing open to develop new skills and meet new people will have you never wanting to leave. Prepare to have your eyes opened, your legs travelled, intellect developed, friends globalised, and experiences made memorable.*

# The IBM University Business Challenge

By Deidre Deery, Careers, Employability and Skills

The IBM University Business Challenge (UBS) represents the type of activity the Careers, Employability and Skills seeks to encourage student involvement in as it offers students the opportunity to develop graduate employability and skills, develop commercial awareness across disciplines, helps to apply academic learning in practice and serves as an introduction to top employers.

The competition also meets the aims and objectives of the Degree Plus programme at Queen's which provides a framework for the accreditation of extracurricular activities undertaken by undergraduate and postgraduate taught students at Queen's.

## What is the competition?

The UBC offers undergraduates within universities or colleges a unique opportunity to improve their knowledge of the business world, put theory into practice and develop their team-working, leadership and employability skills. The Challenge gives participants the chance to work as management consultants in a series of realistic, simulated companies, making all the critical business decisions that affect the company's performance. Simulations are varied and challenging - and range from manufacturing to service businesses to ensure a rounded experience. They increasingly attract participants across all faculties from leading universities.

280 teams contested round 1 and the top 73 teams from this round went through to the round 2 semi finals run live over one day and held at 8 different sponsoring company venues around the UK.

The two teams entered from Queen's University Belfast were successful in going through to this round.

The round 2 semi-finals gave participating students the opportunity to meet fellow competitors, meet the UBC sponsors-all leading graduate employers and hear presentations on internships, placement and graduate schemes. Above all, UBC participants have the opportunity to demonstrate their talent and develop their employability skills.

One of the two teams representing Queen's made it through to the top 10 teams who competed in the Grand Final.

## How well has Queen's done?

Queen's team came 3rd representing a fabulous achievement for all concerned. From 270 teams entering to achieve both teams going through to semi-final and then 3rd in Grand

Final is a measure of the talented undergraduates currently studying in Queen's.

## How big an achievement is this?

I believe this achievement is the start of Queen's participation in this premier undergraduate business competition and I would like to think that next year Queen's will enter a significantly higher number of teams with the participants from this year's competition acting as mentors to the 20011-12 competitors.

## What prize did they win?

£250

## What did they have to do to win?

As above

## Who was involved and how?

Supported by the Queen's annual fund the competition represented a partnership between Careers, Employability and Skills and Enterprise SU who initially brought students together to make them aware of the opportunity, selected teams and entered the completion. Once the teams were established they were supported and mentored by Vincent Murray, Enterprise SU, James McKevitt, Postgraduate student and additional members of academic staff who provided specific expertise as required.

## How does this benefit the students and the University?

This type of competition benefits students in a number of ways but primarily in exposing them to the world of business, meeting potential



The semi-final winners from Queen's University Belfast: Jason Elkin, Donnchadh Long, Claire Watson, Harry Davies and Owen McMeel. They were supported on the day by Vincent Murray.

employers and enhancing their CV. It also provides the opportunity to enhance commercial awareness and provide evidence of their ability to work, compete and succeed in this environment. For the University it adds value to the student experience at Queen's and provides a forum to raise the profile of the University and the quality of our undergraduate students.

## When was the last time Queen's did well in this competition?

Now in its eleventh year I cannot track if we ever progressed to even Semi-finals before.

## What does it mean for the future (are there further competitions to come off the back of this)

We have worked hard this academic year to raise the profile of competitions that Queen's students

may enter and have been rewarded with success in the IBM University Business challenge, Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year award and Accenture Leaders of Tomorrow.

## Any other relevant information that can help sell this to news desks?

This type of student participation is very much in keeping with the Degree Plus initiative introduced by Queen's in 2008 which seeks to not only encourage students to engage with a wide range of activities to promote Employability skills but also enable them to recognise, present and articulate learning derived from their involvement and apply this learning in the graduate marketplace.

# History and Society: a learning experience in the Flexible Teaching Space

By Professor Sean Connelly, History and Anthropology



In 2009-10 my colleague Mary O'Dowd and I agreed to run an experimental module for students in their second year of Modern History.  It was, in many respects, a foolhardy commitment.

There was general agreement in our School that existing provision raised two central problems.  There was too much passive learning, leaving students unprepared for the much greater level of initiative that would be required in year three, especially in writing their dissertations, and there was little at any stage of our programme to address the issues of skills and employability now urgently forcing themselves on our attention.   At the same time colleagues were already heavily committed: there simply were not the human resources to offer another conventional module to around 80 students.

The proposed solution was to make a virtue out of a necessity.  "History and Society" would be a different kind of module, where the emphasis would be on students learning through group discussion and cooperative work.  At its core was a project where groups of six to eight students would prepare a business plan for the development of a historical site as a museum or heritage centre.  To do so they would have to apply their historical skills to deciding what aspects of the past their chosen site would illustrate, and how.  At the same time they also had to engage with issues of costing, fund-raising and marketing, aided by workshops contributed by the Enterprise Unit in the School of Management.

This was all very well.  But it was teaching of a kind no one in my School had attempted before, and the logistical problems were daunting. How were 80 students to be facilitated in working in groups? How were ten or more separate groups to be kept progressing together as a unit?  How could we be sure that all members of each group pulled their weight?  And what, in practice, could we do to develop the skills in group work and presentation that we claimed to have put at the heart of the module?

It was at this stage that memories of a presentation by Gill Kelly on the Flexible Teaching Space (FTS) that I had attended some time before came to our rescue.  Successful group work requires as a minimum a large open space with flexible seating, features not by any means easy to find in most of the teaching space available in Queen's.  But the FTS offers so much more:  ingeniously designed interlocking furniture, flexible lighting, movable whiteboards.  There are also wireless tablet PCs for each group, each linked both to its own plasma screen and to a central control. This last technological resource, in particular, made it possible to keep up the momentum throughout a succession of two-hour workshop sessions for 40 or more students a time.  Short bursts of group activity could be with report sessions, where oral presentations by representatives of different groups could be supplemented by visuals created collectively on the spot, and work produced by different groups could be placed side by side on the master screen for comparison and all-group discussion.

No new teaching venture is going to be free of teething troubles.  In this particular case, however, where the technology was in the hands of the students, we found that even the occasional technical glitch could in fact play its part as a bonding exercise. This year, in any case, much improved connectivity has greatly improved the speed and reliability of the tablet PCs. There is also the need for vigilance in order to ensure full participation:  you have to make sure that it is not always the same member of a group that comes forward to speak, and that the tablet PCs move from hand to hand within each group.  But overall the experiment has been a huge success. Students have had the experience of moving back and forth between small group discussion and more formal presentations to the whole class.  They have had to work together both on a long term project and on formulating immediate responses on particular issues.  They have been able to experiment with different methods of combining the spoken word and the visual image.

Finally, this has been an effective way of working with large numbers.  In the current year, in fact, I have delivered the module single handed, to 83 students.  This is not, of course, the only sort of teaching we want to - or indeed ought to - offer our students. But all the signs are that we will need to do more of it in the next few years, as resources are further squeezed.  In that challenging environment, where students are also increasingly prone to ask exactly what they are getting for the fees they pay,  the FTS points to one way in which, when we do teach large numbers, we can make it a genuine learning experience.

**If you wish to use the Flexible Teaching Space (PFC/03/017) next academic year, ask your School Timetabling Liaison Officer to request it.** To find out more about how you can use the space for your module, contact Gill Kelly, CED, **g.m.kelly@qub.ac.uk**. To find out more about the technology available in the room, contact David Robinson, Information Services, extn 6164, **david.robinson@qub.ac.uk**.

## The Higher Education Academy

# Student Plagiarism Event 2011

### Queen's University Belfast

## Academic integrity: exploring a holistic approach for preventing student plagiarism

Canada Room/Council Chamber
10.00 am, Monday, 27 June 2011

### Information about the event:

This interactive workshop will discuss a range approaches that can help to prevent student plagiarism. The workshop aims to provide participants with an overview of current practice and ways to proactively reduce incidents of plagiarism in their own institutions.

More specifically, the workshop will offer opportunities to:

- Review a range of assessment strategies to minimise plagiarism possibilities;
- Consider approaches to supporting students' academic skills development;
- Reflect on policies for unacceptable academic practice;
- Consider an approach to using text-matching tools effectively.

### Speakers:

- **Dr Jude Carroll,** Oxford Brookes University
- **Dr Arlene Hunter,** Open University in Ireland
- **Dr Erica Morris,** Academic Integrity Service, Higher Education Academy
- **Dr Lillian Greenwood,** Queen's University Belfast

### Bookings

Please email bookings to:

**Karen Butler
Email: ced@qub.ac.uk**

*60 places available on first-come, first-served basis.*

# The Challenge for Graduates in a Changed World

## AISHE
### All Ireland Society for Higher Education
7th International Conference

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- Students as Researchers
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