

Dr Joan Rahilly, School of English

## 1. CONTEXT FOR THE APPLICATION (300 words maximum)

*Please provide a context for your application. This should consist of an introductory statement about your contribution to learning and teaching/learning support to date. Examples of the information you might include are; the subject you teach or the area of learning support you work in, the type of learning and teaching/learning support activities you are involved in, how many learners are involved, your particular learning and teaching/learning support interests and an outline of your overall teaching/learning support philosophy?*

I teach Language and Linguistics in the School of English, and deliver undergraduate and postgraduate modules in phonetics and phonology, covering speech production and variation in applied and theoretical contexts. My work with students focuses on the communicative impact of speech, incorporating data from and analysis of, for instance, child language acquisition, regional and stylistic speech varieties, and clinical speech types. The Level 1 module in Linguistics (which I convene) has a typical enrolment of 250. My Level 2 introductory module in phonetics is limited to 60 students, and my Level 3 offering provides 35 places for students. At PG level, all but one of our current intake has opted for my phonology modules this semester.

My particular contribution to teaching is a systematic, contact-intensive methodology for engaging students, enhancing their performance and equipping them for further study and/or employment in ways that cannot be achieved within timetabled contact hours of lectures and tutorials. In the areas of curriculum development, assessment and feedback, and employability and skills, I provide students with what they consistently rate as high quality undergraduate and postgraduate experiences of working in the School of English.

In addition to my module-specific interaction with students, my commitment to engaging students holistically in their learning and in the life of QUB led me, in 2008, to plan and implement a Peer Mentoring programme for the School of English<sup>1</sup>. The scheme has been rolled out in a number of Schools and is now well-established and well-regarded across the University. Currently, I am co-designing a skills module for first year students which will be added to the curriculum for English and Linguistics in 2010. While the new module enables an obvious focus on the skills agenda, it has the added benefit of increasing students' contact time with the subject, and enabling extended encounters amongst students and colleagues in the area.

## 2. DISCUSSION

*You should illustrate your discussion throughout with reference to specific learning and teaching/learning support activities. You should also provide examples of the influence of learner feedback on your learning and teaching/learning support practice.*

### (a) Promoting and enhancing the learners' experience (1000 words maximum)

My contribution to promoting and enhancing students' learning experience relates to (i) curriculum development, (ii) assessment and feedback and (iii) employability and skills.

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<sup>1</sup> The background and some early results of the scheme were reported in *Reflections*, May 2010, and more details are available at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/CentreforEducationalDevelopment/CurriculumDevelopment/TeachingEnhancementStudentSuccessFund/2010projects/>

*(i) Curriculum Development*

One of my contributions to curriculum development in the School of English was the establishment of named strands (at Minor and Joint levels) in Linguistics, in order to enable students interested in PG work in educational, forensic and clinical linguistics to highlight their UG achievement in a relevant area of expertise. As Director of Education in the School until 2008, I oversaw the planning of the Creative Writing degree pathway at UG level, and negotiated with the Royal Literary Fund (RLF) for the provision of a Fellow in Writing Skills. Successive RLF Fellows have played a key role in helping the School deliver tailored and concentrated advice for students on planning and producing written work.

My current work on curriculum development centres on initiatives which help students to understand the potential impact of their undergraduate programme upon the worlds of work and further study. For instance, the new skills module for first year students (ENG1007, scheduled for delivery in 2012; see also section iii below) will explore a diverse range of areas in which students on English and Linguistics pathways can best apply their subject-specific skills within and beyond the university context. By providing training and support for enhancing students' communication, teamwork and presentation skills, the module will make explicit the breadth of English literary and language studies as a rich foundation for lifelong learning.

My final year module in phonetics and phonology has undergone some reorganisation for its next delivery, and the wide-ranging emphasis on communication will be captured by the new title: 'Speech Worlds: Phonetics and Phonology in Communication'. With an eye to ensuring that curriculum development in my specialist area is cognisant of appropriate professional standards, I liaise with a number of individuals in CCEA (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) and BELB (Belfast Education and Library Board). At MA level, too, I monitor my offerings in theoretical phonology in order to equip students with an understanding of the current applications of what is traditionally considered to be something of an esoteric discipline.

*(ii) Assessment and feedback*

My assessment methods, formative and summative, allow students to engage analytically and theoretically with speech data in a manner appropriate to undergraduate and postgraduate work in the field. Nonetheless, I believe that what differentiates my work with students in phonetics and phonology from that of other UK and Irish universities is our focus on the applications and implications of speech variation. For example, we consider data drawn from language acquisition and variation contexts, from clinical varieties of speech, and from educational environments. The sustained contact with real data, in seminar work as well as assessment, equips students with the necessary skills for profiling speech according to relevant models and criteria, and it prepares them to deal with speech contexts which they will encounter beyond their undergraduate study. One piece of coursework, for instance, presents spoken data from young children, requiring students to analyse the samples within a developmental phonological framework and to present coherent accounts of aspects such as phonological awareness, where the latter is known to be closely linked to the acquisition of literacy skills. Past students who have gone on to careers in Speech and Language Therapy, Forensic Linguistics and teaching, note that their experiences in the QUB phonetics modules were foundational in shaping their understanding of the relevance and application of academic work to the practicalities of human communication.

Students receive feedback for every piece of work they submit for my modules. In the majority of cases, feedback takes place in one-to-one sessions, in which students are invited to reflect upon and articulate all aspects of their developmental progress in formative and summative work. These sessions enable students to reflect upon, critically analyse and boost their performance throughout the semester. For summative work, too, I provide individual feedback sessions, in which students re-examine and evaluate their own assessed work and consider how best to incorporate their learning into future assessments. In my experience, the high level of engagement which we expect from our students, as well as the cognitive and

transferable skills promised by our Programme Specifications, can only be realised in such a context of sustained interaction between student and teachers. My students have commented that weekly individual feedback has encouraged them to approach their work more rigorously, and that they have acquired confidence and poise in presenting *themselves* alongside their written work as part of their learning development.

Of course, QUB's Assessment Policy articulates the need for 'appropriate and timely feedback', and encourages colleagues to review feedback practice on an ongoing basis. While there is no doubt, from NSS ratings, that feedback practice in the university is improving in line with the institutional imperative, my ongoing experience with students demonstrates some remaining problems. For example, students frequently receive rather terse, written comments whose relevance to their work they are often unable to decipher. Where such difficulties of interpretation arise, students are reluctant to ask for further details from markers. My view is that the unequivocally positive role of feedback on academic and intellectual growth, leading to the HEA's seven principles of good feedback<sup>2</sup>, can be realised best by means of oral, interpersonal delivery.

*(iii) Employability and skills*

As indicated above, the applied nature of my teaching suggests some natural areas of employment for students in applied linguistic and phonetic areas, but my approach to employability and skills extends beyond my own research and teaching areas. I am currently co-designing (with Dr. Malte Urban) a skills module for first year students which will be launched in 2012. We are casting the new module as one which will professionalise the UG degree experience in English, drawing on ideas from our 'Professionalising the PhD' programme<sup>3</sup>, and demonstrating the School's commitment to enhancing students' fit to various worlds of work. The module will establish and facilitate ongoing links between students, employers and practising professionals, and will make explicit for students the skills which are sought in the workplace. It will be structured around a programme of lectures, workshops and fieldwork exercises, with each activity targeting a particular skill already introduced in the other English and Linguistics modules, and demonstrating how the skill in question can be enhanced and transferred in various fields. The module will give students a firm understanding of the conceptual, analytic, organisation and communication skills acquired during undergraduate study, and the ability to refine and apply those skills effectively in social, cultural, academic and employment contexts.

Within the last year, I have worked with colleagues in the Learning Development Service (LDS) to ensure that students who act as Peer Mentors in the School can avail of Degree Plus, as a means for enhancing their employability prospects after graduation. The PM programme has now been established as giving Route A access to Degree Plus (i.e. requiring 'significant input and work'<sup>4</sup> from students). One of our former mentors is now employed by LDS, with the specific remit of implementing good practice in Peer Mentoring in QUB.

**(b) Supporting colleagues and influencing support for student learning (350 words maximum)**

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<sup>2</sup> The Higher Education Academy (2004) *Enhancing Student Feedback through Effective Formative Feedback*. The HEA's seven principles are as follows:

- (i) Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning.
- (ii) Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning.
- (iii) Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards).
- (iv) Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance.
- (v) Delivers high quality information to students about their learning.
- (vi) Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.
- (vii) Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape the teaching.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofEnglish/ProspectiveStudents/Programmes/PostgraduateStudies/ProfessionalizingthePhD/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/degreeplus/DegreePlusAward/RouteA/>

## APPLICATION FOR STUDENT-NOMINATED TEACHING AWARD 2011

- I have been responsible for liaising with colleagues in the School of English since the inception of the Peer Mentoring scheme and the Personal Tutor system, largely for the purpose of raising awareness of and expertise in dealing with student concerns at curricular and extra-curricular levels.
- I have led an HEF Forum on Peer Mentoring for colleagues across the University, in order to disseminate findings from the first iteration of the Peer Mentoring programme.
- I have worked closely with colleagues in QUB's support services, in order to provide students with optimum support for learning.
- I have been a member of various *ad hoc* groups, in which I have supported junior colleagues through their probationary periods and, up to this academic year, have been an academic appraiser in the School.
- I have been involved in several Periodic Review activities, currently by way of my membership of the Collaborative Provision Group.
- I have been responsible for co-ordinating the training of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the School during my time as DE and, subsequently, for contributing to ongoing development of TAs in my own subject area.
- I deliver a training session to postgraduate students on our Professionalising the PhD programme.
- As well as PhD supervision within my own School, I act as second supervisor for a PhD student in Drama, a Strategic Award holder whose bid for funding I helped assemble.

### **(c) Ongoing professional development (350 words maximum)**

- My current work with CCEA and BELB is fuelling my present initiatives in the professional development of my teaching, as I continue to explore areas of impact for my subject area and its vocational relevance for my students.
- I attended a recent symposium at University College Dublin (hosted by the UCD Virtual Library and Archive), with the aim of discussing current techniques in storing linguistic data to enable student access to searchable online databases.
- I attended the last PALNET (Peer Assisted Learning Network) conference, to share ideas about Peer Mentoring schemes, and I intend to be present at the forthcoming summer conference.
- I am involved in the School's Peer Observation Scheme which allows all colleagues to attend and comment upon one another's lectures and/or seminars, as a means for standardising excellent practice in teaching.

The Appendix to this document provides sample student evaluations of my teaching and support for the most recent delivery of one of my undergraduate modules (ENL2001, 2010-2011). The students' comments capture their high level of engagement with the module content, and their grasp of the applied nature of their learning. In addition, they note the role of feedback in allowing them to enhance their work on an ongoing basis, and they express satisfaction with the contact and support I provide throughout their time on the module.