Fr Feidhlimidh Magennis – Principal Lecturer in the Religious Studies Department

HOST ORGANISATIONS: St Agnes’ Choral Society in association with the Grand Opera House, Belfast
www.stagneschoralsociety.co.uk  www.goh.co.uk

Placement Contacts:  St Agnes’ Choral Society Chairman: Mr Peter Burke and Director (Consultant): Mr John Donnelly
Grand Opera House: Resident Stage Manager: Ms Anne Muldoon

THE PLACEMENT
Each year St Agnes’ Choral Society hires the Grand Opera House in Belfast as the venue for their annual musical production. Fr Feidhlimidh Magennis has, in recent years, stepped back from ‘on-stage’ roles to become more involved in assisting with Stage Management. In 2005, the production of the musical ‘Gigi’, under the professional directorship of Mr John Donnelly, provided the opportunity for Feidhlimidh to act, with full responsibility, as ‘Stage Manager’ at the Grand Opera House, Belfast.

The placement included consideration of policies and statutes relevant to health and safety, disability, copyright of script and music, contractual obligations associated with costume hire and the general terms of the Grand Opera House rental contract regarding the ‘Get-in’ and ‘Get-out’ procedures.

Naturally the demands on team building, supervision and coordination were immense and it was in these areas of expertise that Feidhlimidh acknowledged the most significant gain in personal and professional development. The professional contributors to the production volunteered that the “very restricted working area behind stage at the Opera House added to Feidhlimidh’s demands as Stage Manager.” Indeed this is proven by the current building programme to improve facilities at the Opera House, including a ‘contemporary style’ extension, improved backstage facilities to accommodate large-scale productions as well as extended accommodation for visiting companies including dressing rooms for up to 100 people and a band room for 60 musicians’ (Irish News, 8 May, 2006).

On Feidhlimidh’s application to become involved in the EU Peace II, Proteus project, ‘Enabling Lecturers to Learn from Business’, he stated:

“My specialist area of communication skills will be of particular interest for theatre/drama organisations. Such groups are engaged in promoting artistic and communication abilities, and in harnessing enthusiasm among volunteers. Experiencing such work at a professional level will be of immense use in the development of course modules in Communication Skills.”

KEY LEARNING POINTS ON BUSINESS
- Valuable experience in managing the budget and operational tasks associated with operating under the terms of the Grand Opera House contract.

- An enhanced understanding of policies relevant to operating in a professional theatre with particular attention to regulations relevant to health and safety, child protection and disability provision.

- An appreciation of the essential combination of verbal and non-verbal commands required to coordinate ‘behind stage’ activities to a professional standard.

POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE BA (Hons) LIBERAL ARTS DEGREE PROGRAMME OF THE UNIVERSITY
A development of useful production skills and insights to the world of theatre should enrich the teaching of Oral Communication Skills within the BA (Hons) Liberal Arts degree programme.

Familiarity with production and management issues associated with back-stage may enable the design of more interactive exercises for students, encouraging them to develop their communication and performance skills.

FUTURE LINKS WITH BUSINESS
To maintain existing and develop new links with professional agents and organisations to support the needs of the St Mary’s Drama Society.