The West Belfast Economic Forum (WBEF), is a non-party political, non-governmental organisation whose membership is drawn from community activists, academics, lawyers, educators and trainers living and working in West Belfast. The organisation works to evaluate the effectiveness of economic and social policies such as inward investment, training programmes, and economic regeneration initiatives in West Belfast.

Dr Gerard McCann, while on placement with the WBEF, was assigned to a project which was aimed at assessing the impact of European funding on the wards within West and North Belfast. The title of the project is 'The Effect and Impact of European Funding on Socio-Economic Development in the Wards of West and North Belfast'. The work was in collaboration with postgraduate students from the Queen’s University Belfast and the data collection was undertaken by staff members of the West Belfast Economic Forum.

The actual specification of the project was to draw down data relating to sectoral receipts of funding from the various European Union programmes and locating the investment in the ward structure of the areas concerned. This was then compared to the Noble and other indicators of poverty and social exclusion for the areas. The effects of the investment were then assessed on the basis of visible, statistic and viable sustainable development within the areas. The extent of investment was also explored in comparison with other compatible initiatives that have been ongoing in the areas concerned and a summary was presented on the actual impact of investment on social and economic dysfunction in these areas. The European Union aspect was then highlighted and the conclusions represented a unique map of targeted investment into areas that have suffered disproportionately during the conflict and due to ongoing socio-economic disadvantage.

### Potential Contribution to the BA (Hons) Liberal Arts Degree Programme of the University
Placement with the WBEF prompted Gerard to comment: “I was able to update information on key issues relating to a specific research interest. This will be adaptable to lectures and the contacts made during the placement will be useful when adapting and upgrading lecture material.”

### Peace and Reconciliation
Involvement with the work of the Research Unit at WBEF in its review of the delivery and impact of Peace and Reconciliation funding was a valued experience. Gerard commented: “There was an ongoing connection with community sector interests from across the political divide. The tensions were obvious and the work on the interface is still a great challenge to all concerned. There was also linkage and debate with various sectoral organisations which interact with other organisations directly working with interface organisations. The closer we seemed to get to the frontline groups the more difficult it seemed. It was useful to see the way in which organisations at the coalface have had to alter to adapt to the situation of changing policies and funding.”

### Personal Learning
Apart from this placement being acknowledged as a useful exercise, Gerard commented: “The organisation was extremely supportive. Even in the height of some very difficult situations there was a consideration for my needs. The members of staff were highly professional throughout and were reflective on the need to develop initiatives such as this for the development of the sector and the interests therein.”