Mr Jonathan Worley – Senior Lecturer in Written Communications

HOST COMPANY: First Trust Bank, First Trust Centre Belfast
www.firsttrustbank.co.uk

Placement Contacts: Mr Sean McArdle, Business Development Executive and Head of Branded Business Ms Sara O’Sullivan, Manager Personal Banking Division Ms Roisin Hackett, Manager Marketing Services

THE PLACEMENT
Contact with Mr Sean McArdle, Business Development Executive and Head of Branded Business at the First Trust Banking Centre, Belfast, resulted in securing a placement for Mr Jonathan Worley. The Centre is the First Trust Headquarters for Northern Ireland Banking and also operates the International Offices for First Trust Marketing Services including communications with their banking operations in Poland.

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

“I teach all modules on written communication, provide individualised tutorials on written communications skills and administer the Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (NI): (which includes the Writing Centre and Peer Tutoring Project). The opportunity during my placement to mix with managers at the front line of business will inform me on the realistic demands placed upon managers in the workplace”.

Jonathan was placed at the First Trust Centre in two key divisions, the Personal Banking Division with Ms Sara O’Sullivan, Manager Personal Banking Division followed by the Marketing Services Department with Ms Roisin Hackett, Manager Marketing Services.

Placement allowed Jonathan to involve himself directly in current projects, such as, a survey to establish impact of First Trust draft promotional pamphlets and contribute to the resulting re-profiling of this essential customer information. Issues of style, clarity and patterns of grammatical error allowed Jonathan to produce the ‘First Trust Style Sheet’, which delineated the kinds of styles used in pamphlets and the patterns of grammatical errors discovered.

Jonathan was also afforded the opportunity to carry out some personal research on ‘essential skills’ initiatives and to explore the ‘written communications’ demands placed on managers at each level of operation within the First Trust banking group. As Jonathan heads up the Writing School at the college, he intends to use his research findings to enhance written communication skills module content in line with the demands of standard management tasks relating to the workplace.

Further to this, Jonathan would like to use his research findings to create a ‘Writing for Business’ Conference (1-2 days) in the hope of attracting business managers or aspiring managers as participants. Having examined a sample of writing courses currently on offer to the business community, Jonathan has identified the potential to create a course more relevant to the real demands of managers in the workplace. As Co-Director of the current university CETL (Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning NI), Jonathan’s participation in the ‘Enabling Lecturers to Learn from Business’ project has indirectly supported progress with one of the core objectives of the CETL programme: Critical Thinking and Analytical Writing.

KEY LEARNING POINTS ON BUSINESS

- Knowledge on ‘above the line’ marketing techniques used by the bank and the particular focus on capturing the student and graduate market.

- Knowledge of a Corporate Responsibility Strategy (CRS) in operation which is described by Mr Dennis Licence, Senior Management Team at First Trust,
"putting back into the community what it has given to us".

POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE BA (Hons) LIBERAL ARTS DEGREE PROGRAMME OF THE UNIVERSITY

Arising from research findings on 'writing for business' a substantive and significant contribution to the Written Communications and Work-based Learning taught units is likely. Jonathan has indicated that one possible avenue for developing a better understanding of business writing skills would be to work more closely with our own students while on placement and perhaps being allowed to shadow or help them with their writing demands as set by their business/organisation mentors.

Direct contact with Morrow Communications, Holywood, who manage First Trust’s public relations needs, prompted Jonathan to express a particular interest in services relating to ‘crisis management’. As a member of the University Outreach Committee, Jonathan intends to represent the need for this type of professional service at a college level.

FUTURE LINKS WITH BUSINESS

Within the term of his placement, Jonathan interviewed senior managers from a wide range of businesses/organisations on the kinds of writing demands placed upon members of the business community. These included representatives from the NI Housing Executive, CCEA, Laganside Trust, and the Department of Health and Social Services, all of which offered significant information and advice. In conclusion, Jonathan’s research indicates a need for business writing training in several areas, such as, elimination of business jargon both in sales material and internal reports, clarity of expression in writing and a review of some fundamental grammar rules as a way of establishing in-house style sheets.

Feedback from employers, apart from valuing Jonathan’s input during his placement, expressed particular interest in any ‘business writing course’ that might arise from Jonathan’s research.

PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

During his placement, Jonathan also explored initiatives followed by the First Trust Bank to promote peace and reconciliation. He indicated a particular interest in the impact of the First Trust membership of ‘Business in the Community’ and the ‘2% Club’. These projects allow members of staff to be released from work to become involved with charity and not-for-profit organisations in the local community to help with the completion of business plans, funding applications and marketing policies etc. The extent of this meaningful involvement was confirmed when Jonathan met with a member of the First Trust Senior Management Team, Mr Dennis Licence, who, at that time, also served as Chairman of the ‘Business in the Community’ Board of Directors. Jonathan stated: “While the work of First Trust related to these initiatives was not particularly directed at sectarianism in the community, it was directed at the community as a whole in ways that might help to end discrimination”.

PERSONAL LEARNING

Jonathan considered his placement worthwhile for the general insights it provided into the Belfast based business community and for the specific insights it gave into the nature of business writing. On a personal level, he stated, “I now feel connected to the Belfast community as a whole and intend to follow-up and extend the network of contacts made during my term of placement”.