Dr Tracey McKay, Senior Lecturer in the Geography Department

HOST ORGANISATION: Newry and Mourne District Council

www.newryandmourne.gov.uk

Contact: Mr Seamus Crossey, Assistant Enterprise Development Officer

THE PLACEMENT

Newry and Mourne District Council is one of Northern Ireland’s twenty six local district councils that were formed in the early 1970s under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland).

On Dr Tracey McKay’s application to become involved in the EU Peace II, Proteus project, ‘Enabling Lecturers to Learn from Business’, she stated:

“I would like to develop my knowledge and understanding of the Council’s statutory remit with respect to tourism, most especially how it ‘fits’ into broader strategic policies and spatial frameworks.”

In order to deliver on this request and resulting from meetings with Mr Seamus Crossey, Assistant Enterprise Development Officer for the Newry and Mourne District Council, shadowing the work of senior managers within the council was considered to be the best format of placement for Tracey. Seamus stated: "BA (Hons) Liberal Arts students placed with us in the past have been set a project within a particular section of the Council. Although this approach might be the easier option, in order to maximize learning at the strategic and policy making level, attendance at meetings and the opportunity to shadow the work of senior managers would be best option for Tracey given her subject area of expertise.”

Tracey’s placement began with an overview of the Newry and Mourne District Council Economic Action Plan. Experiences included familiarisation with the work of the Economic Development Unit and the role of the District Development Committee. Attendance at a meeting with the Council’s Cross Border INTERREG Coordinator allowed Tracey to learn more about the Council’s involvement in economic development projects. The opportunity to visit the various regeneration initiatives within the Newry and Mourne area accompanied by personnel who had been actively involved in overseeing the projects provided a fascinating insight into the nature of local participation in regeneration. Tracey indicated that this was one of the most valuable learning opportunities of the entire placement as it allowed her to observe the processes of change which hitherto had only been ‘known’ from scholarly texts.

Direct involvement with the Council’s Eco-Week included working closely with the Environmental Liaison Officer and the Environmental Awareness Officer allowed Tracey to become familiar with the Council’s Waste Management Strategy and its impact on the local area.

Tracey even left herself open to spending a day with the Council’s Dog Warden which brought home the scale of the problem caused by stray and dangerous dogs. Tracey considered that the role of a local Dog Warden was not for the faint hearted. She observed the many challenges, particularly when dealing with the public who were, on occasion, hostile and aggressive to the interventions of the Dog Warden.
It is not possible in this report to represent all of the Council functions with which Tracey became familiar. Mr Seamus Crossey commented, "Tracey's enthusiastic approach and easy personality allowed us to secure contact with a range of council departments and personnel. Potential learning was enhanced by a high level of preparation on Tracey's part and her attention to support documentation provided. Partnership with St Mary's College has, again, resulted in a meaningful exchange for all parties."

**KEY LEARNING POINTS ON BUSINESS**

Although aware that the function of local council extended beyond 'emptying the bin and burying the dead', knowledge of the sheer diversity of work done was invaluable, particularly in the area of economic/district development. Direct knowledge was also acquired on the Council's Development Strategy, its Economic Action Plan (2001-2007) and the impact of the Peace Dividend in promoting peace and reconciliation by enhancing economic and social prosperity.

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

In the case of BA (Hons) Liberal Arts students completing modules in geography the relevance of their discipline for future employability can be represented. The skills and qualities developed through studying geography are highly transferable into a variety of roles within local government.

Tracey stated: "I look forward to helping our BA (Hons) Liberal Arts geography students appreciate the highly desirable knowledge base and suite of skills they have to offer potential employers."

**FUTURE LINKS WITH BUSINESS**

Particular links with the Newry Museum have continued beyond the term of placement. A 'focus-group' meeting took place on 19 June 2006 at the Newry Museum and facilitated an exchange between members of the Museum staff and representatives from the college geography, history and science departments.

Ms Noreen Cunningham, Curator at the Newry Museum stated: "Work done by BA (Hons) Liberal Arts students on placement in the past has been extremely valuable. I am very grateful for this opportunity to extend our relationship with the college as contact with Tracey and her colleagues provided essential information to support drawing up the Job Description for the new museum role of Education and Community Outreach Officer."

**PEACE AND RECONCILIATION**

The European Union Programme of Building Sustainable Prosperity has provided the Newry and Mourne Council with a budget of £1.3 million to assist with the development of a range of economic initiatives and 'partnerships' in key areas, such as, tourism, indigenous business development and business infrastructure, trade development and inter-regional activities.

Time spent with the Newry Museum featured detail of the joint project with the Dundalk Museum which aimed to encourage cultural exchange, mutual understanding and respect between people on a cross-border and cross-community and cross-generational basis.

**PERSONAL LEARNING**

Tracey stated: "As a result of my placement I enhanced my knowledge and understanding of Newry and Mourne Council as an agent of change, both within the council administrative boundary and at an inter-regional scale, where it works closely with other District Council 'partners' to benefit from economies of scale. This placement has given me a more nuanced understanding of the nature of partnerships and business synergy operating between stakeholders with an interest in local economic development and change. From my privileged vantage point as participant observer, it was fascinating to watch business being transacted by 'partners' and I have no doubt that my teaching (and the students learning) will be enriched by the knowledge I have acquired."