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## **Academic Leadership and Curriculum Change: the Development of a Programme in Applied Social Studies**

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### **Introduction**

The last decade has been a period of rapid change within Ireland's Institutes of Technology (ITs). On the positive side the period has seen a major expansion in funding, especially for the development of buildings and facilities, but also for staffing and access initiatives. The range and nature of courses has expanded, and a number of institutions (Waterford, Cork, Sligo and Galway-Mayo) have gained the authority to self-validate some or all of their qualifications within the new national qualifications framework. On the negative side, the ITs face a strong demographic challenge (McDonagh & Patterson, 2002). A predicted decline in number of school leavers will see intensified competition with the university sector and, while particularly threatening in the sciences, this is likely to affect all areas.

Key changes are taking place in curriculum, reflecting debates over the place of third-level education in a dynamic, knowledge-based society. This paper outlines a process of curriculum development in the applied social studies programme ('the programme') at the Institute of Technology, Sligo (ITS). It describes the context within which the programme has developed; explores facets of educational change and academic leadership; outlines the key learning outcomes and strategies of the programme; delineates the theoretical bases for the changes made and proposed; and reviews the implementation of the revised programme. The period of change roughly covers the period 1998-2004.

As the author is involved in this process not only as lecturer, but as head of the relevant department, the link between academic leadership and change is accorded particular attention. While the changes taking place in the IT sector affect all staff, it is often the Head of Department who, at the point where day-to-day management meets policy-making, is most actively involved in initiating, guiding and implementing change: especially in matters related to curriculum and teaching/learning.

### **The Programme**

The applied social studies programme at ITS constitutes (as of early 2004) a National Diploma and add-on BA (Honours) degree in the field of Applied Social Studies in Social Care. The programme is one of a number of broadly similar programmes offered by a variety of institutions (1). Its aim is to provide trained social care practitioners for the social care industries, but also to prepare graduates in a broader sense for employment or further education.

The programme had its origins in a course for residential childcare workers, first accredited by the National Council for Educational Awards [NCEA] in 1979, and specifically established to provide qualifications for the staff of the Loughan House juvenile detention centre in Co Leitrim. The programme - now much changed - currently admits 60-80 students into first year,

with approximately 50-60 students entering the (fourth) BA year. Total student numbers on the programme at any one time are thus approximately 230-300.

The programme may be conveniently divided into three aspects:

- skills-based subjects, such as applied social care, communication, computer applications and art/drama
- 'academic' contextual social studies such as ethics, law, sociology and psychology
- work practica of 6 to 12 weeks duration (2).

### **Context**

The development of the programme reflects rapid and continual change in the social care field. The course submitted to the NCEA in 1979 was aimed specifically at the requirements of the residential childcare sector and the need to provide education to non-formally trained staff (NCEA, 1986). Subsequent course developments have reflected changes in the provision of care for young people, in particular the move from the model of large children's home and correctional facilities towards smaller units and community-based responses to young people in need of support (Focus Ireland, 1996; O'Neill, 1999; Bailey, 1999). The field of 'social care' has itself expanded greatly (Gallagher & O'Toole, 1999) to embrace work with a number of vulnerable groups in Irish society, including Travellers, those with disabilities; those with learning difficulties; substance abusers; and refugees. The development of the field has been reflected in the suite of courses developed at national level in the wake of the reports of NCEA Working Parties in 1986 (NCEA, 1986) and 1992 (Ennis, 1998: 11). Most recently the course has again had to address the provision of education and training of non-qualified staff, in the light of the shift towards professionalisation and registration within the social care field. In a sense the course has travelled in a full circle.

Course changes have reflected the ongoing professionalisation of social care work: a process still in development and a matter of some contention (McElwee, 1998; O'Neill, 1999: 36-7). It has been widely acknowledged that graduates in social care now require sophisticated and flexible decision-making and critical skills, in addition to a broad range of practical skills and factual knowledge (Clarke, 2003; Navarro & Torras, 2002). Courses in applied social studies therefore typically address a broad range of abilities, qualities and competencies.

The demand for an increased level and depth of knowledge has been reflected in the development of courses at the BA level. The industry has clearly identified its requirements for highly skilled graduates at entry level, and also for ongoing development for those already in the social care workforce. It has identified a broad range of skills and qualities that are deemed necessary for the applied social studies graduate within the contemporary social services (Clarke, 2003).

The theoretical and conceptual basis of social care in Ireland has been strengthened, through the development of regional, national and European research activities (EUROARRCC, 1998); establishment in 1998 of the Irish Association of Social Care Educators (IASCE); and the foundation in the same year of this journal. The education of social care workers must develop to a level of sophistication to match the professional aspirations of workers in the field and the complex demands of an information-based late-modern European society.

While the National Diploma remains the entry-level qualification for the Health Boards and other employers, a clear majority (*c.* 75%) of students at ITS now elect to complete a fourth year of study to attain an Honours BA degree. This has had important implications for the development of both National Diploma and BA courses. In particular it has allowed for the development of coherent sequences of subjects to cater for specific interest areas, and for the provision of specialist electives.

Changes in staff skills, student intake and course patterns have also helped to underpin important changes in teaching/learning practice and philosophy. There is an international shift towards more flexible student-centred learning, and an emphasis on transferable and generic skills, self-directed learning and personal development (NBEET, 1994; Biggs, 1999: 1-11; Coaldrake, 1999). This calls for changes in the practice and organisation of teaching: with a shift towards more independent use of learning resources, such as library and computer-based resources; an increased focus on personal development, decision-making skills and teamwork; and a reduction in 'one-way' instructional methods.

There is a broad and expanding range of educational opportunities available to those who aim for a career in social care or allied fields. The applied social studies programmes within the Institute of Technology sector, including that at ITS, must strive to retain their pre-eminence in an increasingly competitive field. They must respond in positive and innovative ways to industry developments and must continue to reflect international best practice. The strength of these courses is crucial to the continued development of the social care services that are so important to the welfare of the most vulnerable within Irish society.

### **Social Care Education and Training**

The need for adequately trained staff in the social care sector has been consistently emphasised in recent reports (eg Focus Ireland, 1996; Clarke, 1998: 82-93, O'Neill, 1999; McElwee *et al*, 2004). It is acknowledged that social care work is becoming more complex and demanding (Focus Ireland, 1996: 12). Training for childcare workers has been described as 'inadequate to the actual task' and 'very inadequate' (Focus Ireland, 1996: 17; 105). Employers in the field have demanded (Focus Ireland, 1996: 104-105) that training be both more wide-ranging and more specific; that it include both increased hands-on training and more teaching of specialist topics. While there is a demand for in-service training, there is also evidence that employers will not or cannot provide this, nor provide for staff to attend at externally provided courses. It can even be argued that employers are seeking to transfer most of their training needs to the IT sector: ideally they would like to be able to recruit well-trained, already-experienced care workers that could 'hit the ground running', but the reality is that they must accept relatively young, minimally experienced graduates who inevitably require further personal and professional development. It is a challenge for the ITs to respond to the articulated needs of industry while at the same time providing a course that is valuable to students and that retains academic integrity.

Australian sociologist Bob Watts (1996: 3) warns against succumbing to the influence of 'scholarly culture', where the curriculum is reduced to a 'canon of knowledge, to which the student is to be introduced and/or expected to master'. Associated with this is the issue of 'academic drift' (Connolly *et al*, 2000: 22) that has been seen to affect the IT sector, as in parallel sectors worldwide. There is indeed a danger in moving too far from the vocational

origins of the applied social studies programme and towards an overly academic, text-based course that reflects a strong 'university' model of teaching (Hessle, 2002). The challenge is to facilitate processes of independent, critical thought amongst students while at the same time helping them to develop the practical skills and competencies, and personal maturity, needed for effective social care work.

### **Leadership and Academic Change**

My own role in this process of curriculum change has been as Head of Department of Humanities, the function that has direct responsibility for the applied social studies programme at ITS. I am also involved as a lecturer in sociology on the fourth year of the programme. As Head of Department I fulfil the role of 'academic leader' in relation to curriculum development. This role involves the 'setting of agendas' for change, the management of such change, as well as active participation in the change process itself.

There has been a developing literature on the place of academic leadership in educational change. Ramsden (1998) emphasises the importance of 'transformational leadership' within the changing context of tertiary education. For Ramsden (1998: 93) educational leadership is about: seizing opportunities for change and realising them in practice; leading the way towards change; and about supporting staff in their own development and learning. Necessarily academic leadership, within a dynamic and rapidly changing environment, is complex and challenging.

The broader discussion on leadership within organisations has focused on the commercial sector. Interestingly Ramsden (1998: 106-109) overtly links the qualities of good leadership in the educational sector with that in business. Goleman (2000) discusses how differing leadership styles impact on organisational change. Though his discussion relates directly to high-level corporate strategy, the arguments have some applicability to educational change: particularly when the stimulus for that change is largely located in an individual. Reviewing six leadership styles, Goleman argues that the 'authoritative' style is most effective in bringing about change, whereas 'coercive' and 'pacesetter' styles have a negative impact. According to Goleman (2000: 84), 'an authoritative leader charts a new course and sells his [*sic*] people on a fresh long-term vision'. The key to this style of leadership is to place proposed change within a broad 'vision' of the future and to reiterate the context of change to those involved.

Goleman's 'authoritative' leader is very similar to Ramsden's 'transformative' one. Each attempts to develop a 'vision' of change and to actively involve others in moving towards that vision in a way that is both participative and purposive. Thus, for Ramsden (1998: 106), good academic leadership:

helps create an environment for academics to learn continually, to make best use of their knowledge, to solve problems in teaching and research collaboratively as well as individually, and to feel inspired to overcome the obstacles presented by change and upheaval in [academic] life

The development of such an environment requires both 'good leadership', in terms of inspiring change, but also 'good management' in terms of helping to bring change about, to maximise its effectiveness, and to bring about the desired outcomes.

Fullan (1989: 205) reminds us that 'most attempts at educational reform fail'. This is not necessarily because the *ideas* behind the proposed change are wrong (though they often are) but rather that the proponents of change frequently fail to recognise that attention to the *process* of change is as important as the *product* of change. Academic leadership is thus about recognising the best ways to bring about change: in Fullan's terms: 'planners . . . have to combine expertise and knowledge about the direction and nature of the change they are pursuing, with an understanding of and an ability to deal with the factors and strategies inherent in the process of change' (1989: 207). Failure to deal with the organisational, cultural, institutional and psychological aspects of the change process may mean that 'the hubris of the change agent becomes the nemesis of implementers' (Fullan, 1989: 206). It is therefore crucial that those wishing to engender change be very conscious of the nature and dimension of possible barriers to change, and of ways to overcome or circumvent these.

For any process of change to be successful, it is necessary that those affected feel *ownership* of it. Change inevitably involves disruption, uncertainty, threats to established ways of working and thinking and often poses challenges to vested interests and sacred cows: indeed some commentators (eg Zangwill & Roberts, 1995) argue that such 'side effects' are both inevitable and desirable. But those affected must feel that they have some control over the process and that ultimately it will bring some benefit to them. Furthermore, a successful change process invariably takes time. Fullan (1989: 212) suggests a period of at least two years for any significant educational change.

Above all, it is important to guard against what Fullan terms 'hyperrationality': just because something 'looks good' on paper does not mean that it will work in practice. The field of education is littered with failed programmes of change. To have any chance of success a programme of change must become the property of those that have to implement and administer it: in short those that have to *live* with it.

### Theories of Curriculum

Ramsden (1998: 80) points to the similarities between 'good academic leadership' and 'good teaching': the principles of participation, ownership, pragmatism and attention to both process and product apply in a like manner. The process of curricular development within the applied social studies programme has sought to apply these principles. Thus, for example, externally-monitored focus groups were convened amongst students and course experience questionnaires administered. The results of these feedback mechanisms were actively considered and responded to by course staff. A sequence of all-day staff meetings explored all aspects of curriculum, from first principles, to industry positions, to student feedback.

Numerous factors impinge on curriculum design, so the theoretical basis of the developments described here can be said to be partly implicit, and partly theorised and explicit. Concepts of student-centred learning; of critical, deep thinking; of increased class and tutor-student interaction; and of an increased focus on student personal development – all have been derived from student and staff feedback. These happen to coincide in many ways with the concerns expressed in contemporary analyses of third-level teaching and learning. The 'theoretical' material on teaching and learning therefore supplements and reinforces the directions already being adopted by those involved with the programme.

As Watts (1996: 3) reminds us, curriculum refers to much more than the ‘syllabus’ – what is ‘taught’. Rather it embraces:

the entire gamut of teaching and learning practices and strategies. This certainly includes syllabus (or knowledge content) but it also applies to the variety of teaching and learning practices and to the techniques of evaluation (of both staff and students) that constitute ‘curriculum’ as signifying the entire educational project

In other words, curriculum includes learning outcomes and objectives, subject content and assessment strategies, but also extends to resourcing, course management, student support and student participation in course development.

The approach that underpins the process of curricular change within the programme is similar to what Biggs (1999: 11) terms ‘constructive alignment’. This means the overall objectives of the programme, the teaching methods used, and the assessment strategies adopted are *aligned* within an overall conceptual and organisational approach. Biggs combines the focus on alignment with an endorsement of a constructivist model of learning: that is, an understanding that learning takes place as students interact with the world through action and interpretation.

Fig 1

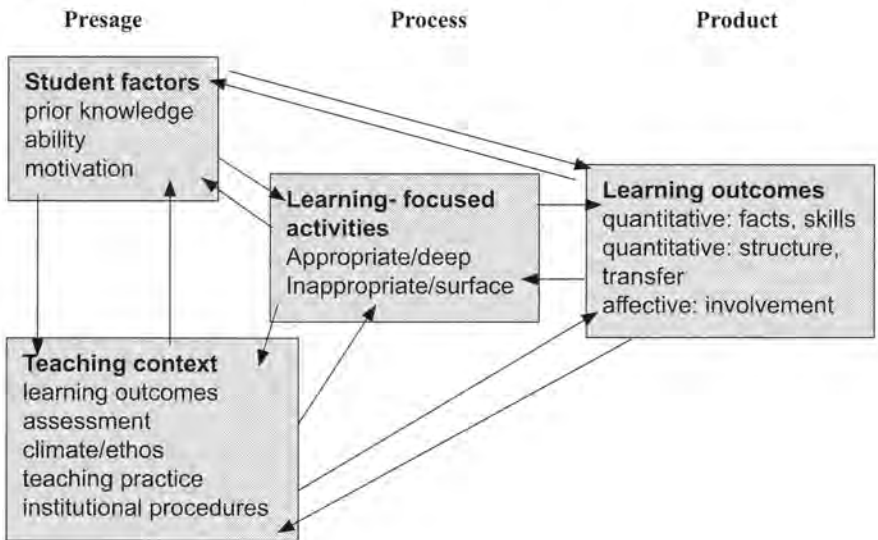


Fig. 1 The 3Ps model of teaching and learning (Biggs, 1999: 18)

An elaborated model of constructive alignment is shown in Fig 1. This outlines the so-called '3P' approach (Biggs, 1999: 18. This model also underpins the discussion in Ramsden, 1998). The 3P approach emphasises that teaching and learning take place within a *system*. The elements of this system:

derive from the students, and from the teaching context. Collectively they determine the cognitive processes the students are likely to use, which in turn determine the detail and structure inherent in the learning outcomes, and how students feel about the outcome (Biggs, 1999: 19)

To bring about educational change in a context of aligned teaching it is crucial to start at the institutional level. Improving teaching is not just about introducing a new 'bag of tricks' but about reflecting on and fully comprehending the global environment within which teaching takes place.

Fig 2

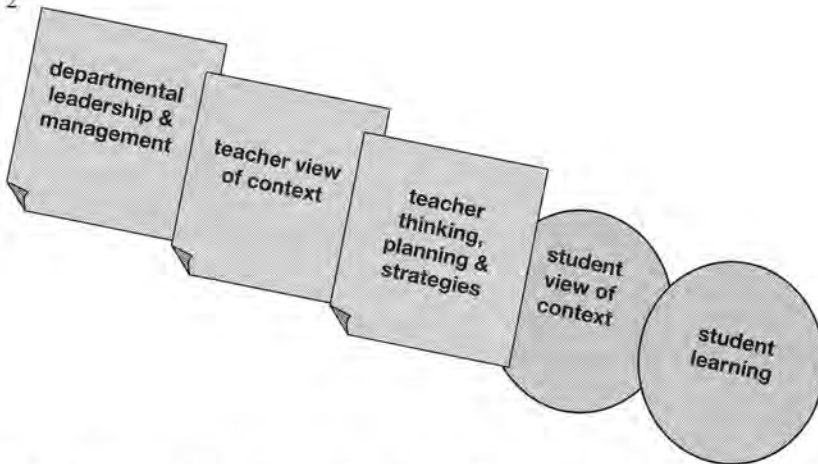


Fig 2. Relationships between institutional context, teaching and learning (Ramsden, 1998: 66)

This point is graphically illustrated by Ramsden (Fig. 2). The process of learning is shaped by a complex set of variables that includes management style and content; staff perceptions of these; staff teaching styles and processes; and student perceptions of all of the above. It is through this system that approaches to academic leadership are linked with processes of learning. An open, reflexive and participatory style of leadership will more likely be conducive to similar types of learning; a dictatorial, top-down or closed style will most likely lead to a mechanistic and surface learning style.

The conceptualisation of learning as *surface* or *deep* (first developed by Marton and Säljö in 1976, cited in Biggs, 1999: 11-12) has been very influential in the understanding of teaching. The former involves an emphasis on facts and details but a failure to engage with the meaning of a text; the latter expresses an appreciation of the deep, structural nature of a body of knowledge. 'Good teaching' is about maximising students' use of the deep approach, while



minimising their attraction to surface approaches. But it is important not to adopt a 'blame the student' approach that effectively divides learners into these two categories. Rather it is important to realise that particular types of teaching and learning contexts and processes lead to the dominance of a particular approach. As Biggs (1999: 17) notes: 'deep and surface approaches to learning describe the way students relate to a teaching/learning environment; they are not fixed characteristics of students, their 'academic personalities' so to speak'.

Unfortunately non-aligned teaching contexts can actively encourage a surface approach: for example over-reliance on written examinations (memory tests) or cramming too much material into the syllabus, perhaps in response to external demands. In short, 'non-alignment is signified by inconsistencies, unmet expectations and practices that contradict what we preach' (Biggs, 1999: 25). There are many such inconsistencies within the IT sector: such as external accreditors' insistence on written examinations; Department of Education regulations in relation to exam payments; approaches to campus development that emphasise particular sizes and style of teaching spaces; and numerous other minor and major impediments to the development of an aligned learning environment.

### **Assessment**

Many writers stress the centrality of assessment to the teaching/learning process. The topic is a complex one that deserves more extended discussion than is possible here (3). The key point is that from the student perspective, assessment practices very largely determine the learning process. If a student must memorise a large number of 'facts' for regurgitation in an exam, than that is where they will direct their energies; if they are confronted with a complex, time-consuming and highly-involved project they will more likely develop 'deep' learning approaches, but may as a consequence be forced to adopt 'shallow' approaches in other subjects due to lack of time. It is crucial therefore, in order to maintain an aligned approach to course development, that great attention be paid to assessment issues.

Of particular utility here is Biggs and Collis's SOLO taxonomy (Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome) (Biggs, 1999: 37-40; 46-50). This taxonomy, derived from a constructivist approach to learning, focuses on the different levels of understanding that a student may have. These are, in order of increasing complexity and sophistication, prestructural, unistructural, multistructural, relational and extended abstract.

As indicated in Fig. 3, the levels reflect a *progression* in the nature of understanding from the very basic to the very sophisticated. Assessment tasks (and teaching) must be aligned with the levels that students have attained, or should have attained. Thus, for example, there is little point in giving first year students complex project work when perhaps they have only attained a multistructural understanding of a topic; conversely if we wish degree level students to exhibit relational and extended abstract thinking, this is unlikely to be facilitated by multiple-choice exams or other mechanisms that generate rote learning.

Fig. 3

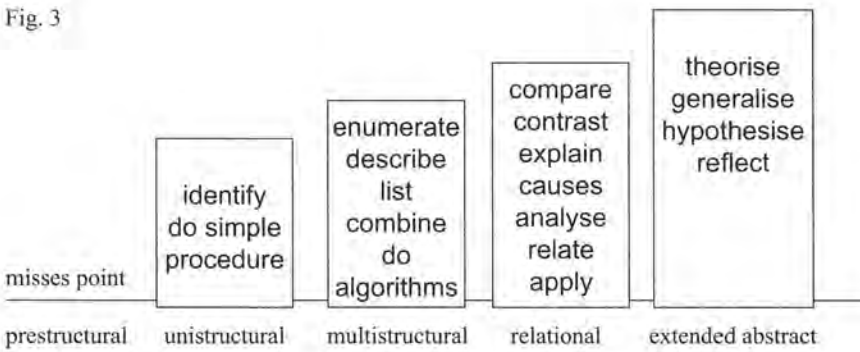


Fig 3. The SOLO taxonomy (Biggs, 1999: 47)

Appropriate assessment strategies are central to aligned teaching. Poor assessment choices have the capacity to severely undermine good work done elsewhere in the curriculum. Within the applied social studies programme moves have been made to overtly address assessment issues: for example through targeted short courses (Share & Mulkeen, 2000). The careful documentation of module outlines, including information on assessment, is not only of great benefit to students and staff, but also helps to reveal the overall assessment load that is required of students and opens assessment methods to greater public scrutiny.

### Programme Plan

The programme is equivalent to four years of full-time study. After three years, students are conferred with a National Diploma in Applied Social Studies (Social Care). Those that achieve an overall Merit 2 score or equivalent (eg successful completion of qualifying exam) may be admitted to the degree year. As previously outlined the programme comprises a combination of practical, academic and work placement elements. In this it reflects parallel courses offered in other ITs and is in many ways similar to accredited social work courses offered by universities (NSWQB, 1999).

The programme currently conforms to the conventional model that operates within most Irish universities and ITs: it is based on sustained progress through individual years of study. This is in contrast to the credit accumulation model that is typical of the American, Australian and, increasingly, British higher education systems. The School of Business and Humanities at ITS is moving towards the fully modularised provision of subjects. This process, still in its early stages, will facilitate the future development of a fully credit-based system and allow for greater flexibility of course design (HEQC, 1996).

The Institute has discontinued the former National Certificate programme. This has facilitated more effective planning and delivery of an integrated 3-year course. The market no longer demands (nor recognises) a 2-year qualification; indeed the majority of students take the BA degree, with significant numbers continuing to Masters level. The development of the *ab initio* diploma makes a statement about the professional position of graduates, placing them on a par with graduates in other areas, such as recreation and tourism.

A decision was also taken to significantly reduce the number of class contact hours per student, while also reducing class size for small-group teaching, ideally to a class size of 15. The former provision of over 23 hours of face-to-face teaching per week, while having a history in the funding and establishment of courses in the then Regional Technical College (RTC) sector, varied significantly from contemporary practice in third-level education. Contact hours per student were reduced as follows: stage 1: 24 to 17; stage 2: 23 to 16; stage 3: 23 to 19; stage 4: 20 to 13. These numbers remain quite high, but can be justified by the need to provide specific skills training in a number of areas. The overall effect on staff teaching hours is minimal, with an increase of about 5%. The greatest increase in teaching hours occurs in the fourth year, due to the introduction of electives. Reduction of class contact hours allows students to make more effective use of improved library and computer resources; it also frees up staff resources for other activities such as placement supervision and one-to-one tutoring. Subjects are more strongly focused and unnecessary duplication eliminated.

### **Learner Profile**

The profile of those entering the programme is changing. The IT sector already attracts a broad social spectrum of students (McGarty & Duffy, 1999) but there is now an increasing number of 'non-standard' applicants, including those articulating from UK-accredited National Diploma and Higher National Diploma (HND) and other post-Leaving Certificate (PLC) courses; VTOS and other 'access courses'; and those with previous work experience seeking accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). There is an increasing demand from those within the social care field for ACCS and distance education provision. There is a major challenge for ITS and other educators in the field to respond to such demands (Share, 2003).

The intake profile to the programme is overwhelmingly female (c90%), a pattern established for a number of years, and common across the sector (McElwee *et al*, 2004). Just as there is a problem in attracting women to 'non traditional' areas such as engineering and the manual trades, so has there been a major difficulty in bringing males into social care. Recent scandals in relation to sexual abuse have not helped, nor has the lack of a clear career structure within the industry. Heretofore there have been few specific initiatives aimed at recruiting men to the programme. A statement has been inserted in the ITS prospectus that encourages males to apply and the course is actively promoted amongst male secondary school students.

### **Learning Outcomes**

The desired learning outcomes form the basis of the National Diploma in Applied Social Studies (Social Care). They state that graduates of the programme will have the following attributes:

- be ready to take up employment as a professional social care worker in the field of their choice
- have developed a range of experiences through structured work placements
- have developed the capacity for independent, critical and original thought
- have a good knowledge of the nature and operations of Irish and EU society and their institutions
- have developed the maturity and personal development to work effectively as an individual and as part of a team

- have developed high level oral, written and interpersonal communication skills
- have developed a range of applicable caring and support skills
- be adaptable and flexible
- have developed the capacity for life long learning: to be able to identify learning needs and to access resources to meet those needs

In addition to the above, the BA course also has amongst its objectives the development of:

- leadership capacities
- research and presentation skills

In 2004 these objectives are being reformulated in line with NQAI requirements.

### **Learning Strategies**

The development of the new programme has seen the introduction or enhancement of some key elements. These include the following:

#### ***Development of seminar system***

All subjects (with the exception of art/drama) are offered in lecture/seminar mode, typically in 1 hour + 1 hour mode or 2+1 mode. Students attend one/two hour lectures (whole class) and then break into small groups for intensive work, formatted in a variety of ways (Race, 1999: 57-59). As some staff were unfamiliar with small group approaches, suitable resources and staff training were made available. More innovative processes, such as problem-based learning (PBL) and peer assessment may also be developed in the future.

#### ***Student self-profiling and advising***

The need to more actively support the personal development of students has been strongly identified. This has been achieved through the expanded seminar structure, and also through the establishment of a formalised process of student self-profiling and advising. The provision of a 'private space' for one-to-one counselling, where necessary, and self-process work is crucial to the effective development of this initiative, and has significant resource implications.

#### ***Assessment strategies***

The assessment load of IT students has tended to be too heavy, helping to reinforce a surface approach to learning. Reduction of the number of discrete assessment items allows students to undertake higher quality work. The normal load for a subject will not exceed two assessment items, excluding terminal examinations. Where possible assessment items are scheduled so as to reduce excessive demands on student time and energy; similarly most assessment tasks during placement have been discontinued. A workshop on assessment skills and options has been provided for staff, and will be further developed in the future through the development of the Institute's Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT).

### **Management and Implementation**

#### ***Quality assurance***

The review of the programme has been significantly shaped by the *Quality 2000* initiative adopted by ITS in 1998. This has subsequently led to the establishment of a comprehensive quality assurance environment; most recently the Institute's quality assurance procedures have been ratified by the NQAI (National Qualifications Authority of Ireland). Of particular

importance has been feedback from staff, students, graduates and the industry. The Institute's quality mechanisms help to ensure that the programme is effectively and consistently monitored and reviewed, with maximum stakeholder participation.

#### ***Human resources***

Within the programme there has been a significant addition of new staff and an upgrading of skills and qualifications of existing staff. The range of expertise and experience is now extensive, and there is a strong desire amongst staff to engage in research and consultancy activity; curriculum development; flexible modes of provision; and innovative methods and topics. There will be a need to further develop and augment staff skills, especially in the area of research. This will be facilitated by further public funding of research in the social sciences.

#### ***Physical resources***

The profile of teaching spaces utilised by the programme has changed: there is a greater demand for larger teaching spaces (60+ lecture theatres) and smaller teaching spaces (16 place seminar rooms; small meeting and consultation rooms) with a consequent decline in demand for medium-sized spaces. This has implications for the future planning of the physical space of the Institute. The provision of comfortably furnished small meeting rooms for one-to-one and small group work has been of great benefit to the programme.

#### ***Learning resources***

Styles of teaching in the IT sector have not tended to encourage independent student use of learning resources. This has been reinforced historically by very poor resourcing of libraries, both in terms of 'hardware' (buildings) and 'software' (books, periodicals, online resources). Recent investment in the ITs, including ITS, has seen a significant improvement in library facilities and stock. Curriculum development necessitates further development of library resources in the social studies area. Electronic sources, particularly online (eg *Infotrack*, *Web of Science*), are becoming increasingly important.

#### **Marketing and Recruitment**

Demand for the existing programme is well established. In 2002 there were over 700 CAO first preferences for the National Diploma: ie approximately 10 applicants for each place. With the inevitability of future demographic change there is a need to maintain this level of demand through marketing the programme to new target groups.

There are also compelling reasons for expanding the recruitment pool for the programme. These include the desire to attract more mature age students from both within and outside the care industry; the need, discussed above, to attract more males to a career in the caring services; and the desire to provide opportunities to those groups, such as those with disabilities, that have had barriers of access to third level education (AHEAD, nd).

Consequent issues include:

- promotion in appropriate media (for example advertising in care industry journals; development of appropriate web-based resources and information)
- issues of articulation and accreditation, identified as of key importance in relation to life-long learning (Department of Education & Science, 2000)
- processes and procedures associated with accreditation of prior experiential

learning (APEL) (Doran, 2000)

- development of niche and tailor-made courses in response to identified market needs.

### **International Dimension**

The course continues to develop its international links and expand the opportunities for ITS students to take up placements or periods of study in Europe, the USA and elsewhere. Staff are encouraged to participate in teaching exchanges and international collaborative research projects. The Institute has in recent years focused specifically on partner institutions in Denmark (Gedved), Sweden (Malmö) and Austria (Wien) as locations for student placement: such linkages have developed from EU sponsored thematic networks. There are moves towards the development of new links with institutions in the United States.

### **Relationships with Industry**

There is some continued scepticism and confusion within the social care industry in relation to academic courses (O'Neill, 1999). As previously outlined, there is a strong demand within the industry for graduates that are 'wound up and ready to go'. At the same time other voices in the industry are calling for independent and critical thinkers that can be flexible and innovative. It is thus important that communication between industry and the staff and students of the course be enhanced.

Industry placements are central to social care education. The Institute continues to produce high quality placement materials, in conjunction with the other providers through IASCE. Due to increased demands, it has been necessary to increase the resourcing of the Placement Coordinator, including assistance with database management. It is important that comprehensive data be maintained on placements, agencies and students. A Placements Committee has been established to support the coordinator and to formulate policy and practice in this area. This includes all lecturers in Applied Social Care, staff who visit students on placement, plus the Placements Coordinator.

### **Conclusion**

The process of change outlined here is a complex and extensive one. It is only possible in a paper such as this to give a 'helicopter view' of what is, on the ground, an intricate and often opaque process. The analysis provided is partly historical, partly aspirational, partly a snapshot of work-in-progress. It is also, while describing a collective process, the view of one person that is both involved in and seeking to guide that process.

If one thing marks out the contemporary world of tertiary education it is the ubiquity of change: nowhere more so than in a country that is itself changing at a sometimes dizzying pace. Such change may be experienced either as exhilaration, as threat, or as business-as-usual. But it is clear that any educational institution, or department, or course that does not actively seek to reinvent itself will ultimately wither and die. The social care industry is central to the future development of a democratic and compassionate Irish society. It behoves those who can help shape the industry of the future to embrace change and to create an educational system that will foster the vibrant, critical and highly skilled practitioners of the next generation.

### Endnotes/footnotes

- 1 The institutions that offer similar programmes are the Institutes of Technology at Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Dundalk, Limerick, Tralee, Blanchardstown and Athlone, St Patrick's College Carlow and the Open Training College. All institutions are members of IASCE – the Irish Association of Social Care Educators.
- 2 Further detailed information on the programme may be found at [www.itsligo.ie/staff/pshare/social](http://www.itsligo.ie/staff/pshare/social)
- 3 Useful and comprehensive discussions of assessment can be found in Brown et al (1997); Biggs (1999), chs. 8 and 9; Ramsden (1992), ch.10; Race (1999), ch.5; Brown & Smith (1997).

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