

Case Study

Agents for Change 2014

Key Points

- An effective example of immersive, interdisciplinary and professionally oriented learning that succeeded in transforming participants as individuals and practitioners.
- This project based module challenged students to consider sustainability issues as they relate to themselves, clients, users, business organisations and local and global communities.
- In successfully engaging with the challenge learners considered their capacity for influence both personally and professionally – and in doing so become agents of real world change.

Who?

The Cardiff School of Art and Design 2014-15 Agents for Change module was delivered in collaboration with Cardiff Met's Sustainable Campus scheme which seeks to implement authentic 'real world' sustainability oriented learning across Cardiff Met curricula. Building on previous Agents for Change iterations, LTDU worked closely with module conveners Dr. Wendy Keay-Bright and Neil Angove to co-ordinate and deliver the second year module to a cohort of approx. 22 students who came from various CSAD based disciplines including Graphic Communication, Ceramics, Product Design and Fine Art.

Why?

Cardiff School of Art and Design is proactive in supporting students to develop as proficient and self-aware practitioners capable not only within their discipline but also in successfully applying such skills and talents within professional contexts. A key aspect of this approach is the highlighting of broad agendas that influence and shape the graphic design industry itself, a practitioner's personal and professional practice (and thus their place within the industry) and critically, the needs of clients and target users. In this regard sustainable development and enterprise agendas have both featured at the forefront of recent higher education enhancement agendas as evidenced by recent QAA guidance documents aimed at enhancing student experience and employability. Through its interdisciplinary format and engagement with real world clients the Agents for Change project has directly addressed a number of key learning outcomes identified by the QAA guidance on education for sustainable development. Key to achieving this was the creation of a project that enabled students to not only engage experientially but in doing so be prompted to consider a range of meta-analyses that examine the notion of 'sustainable graphic design'. In particular the concept prompts an important question of the graphic design practitioner: To what extent can the profession begin to set agendas for beneficial sustainable change (social as well as environmental) and how can a practitioner become an agent for such change?

How?

Noel Entwistle has stated of transformative learning: 'as people begin to see learning as involving the effort to make sense of ideas for themselves by relating it to their previous knowledge and experience, information becomes transformed into personal meaning. Beyond that, learning involves seeing things in an importantly different light, and so becomes fully transformative of understanding. Finally, people may begin to experience learning as transformative in a broader sense, namely changing them as a person'. The process of individual transformation sits at the heart of the Agents for Change module. In order to effect real world external change an individual must also be prepared to change internally through experience and reflection which contributes to an individual's development as an effective and self-aware practitioner of their craft. The Agents for Change project saw Cardiff Met students act as consultants to a regional family run business with sustainability interests. Eco Camping Wales are a small family oriented campsite set in the national park of the Brecon Beacons who encourage visitors to engage in sustainability awareness and activity. Seeking to develop their business, Eco Camping Wales were keen to garner the ideas and opportunities proposed by CSAD students. As such the Eco Camping Wales campsite acted as a stimulus for enquiry and experiential based learning among the CSAD students. The consultation process saw students consider various aspects of the sustainability agenda (people, place, economic factors) as they applied both to the clients but also to themselves as practitioners and thus as agents of change.

Outcomes

The project was a successful example of a stimulating, immersive and enquiry led live project that melded learner's disciplinary knowledge and talent with key pillars of sustainable development as they apply to Graphic Communication and beyond. Student outputs were of extremely high quality and several ideas proposed have been taken up by the client.

