

Case Study

The Real World Project 2014

Key Points

- Authentic, learner centred, project based pedagogies prompted direct student engagement with a range of real world sustainability issues faced by Cardiff Met and its students.
- Students worked with actual clients and target user groups to create real solutions to real issues that are being taken forward and implemented by the institution.
- Highlighted the broader social, economic and environmental contexts in which the discipline and profession of Graphic Communications exists.

Who?

The 2014 Real World Project was coordinated and delivered as part of Cardiff Met's Sustainable Campus scheme which seeks to engage students with real world sustainable development issues faced by the institution and its staff. Cardiff Met's Learning and Teaching Development Unit worked closely with project leader Dr. Wendy Keay-Bright and lecturer Neil Angove to coordinate The Real World Project, part of a pivotal final year module within Cardiff School of Art and Design's Graphic Communication programme. The module was delivered to a cohort of 34 students.

Why?

The CSAD Graphic Communication programme emphasises the importance of developing and applying professional skills as aspects of design practice within the context of wider cultural agendas. By asking learners to address real world sustainability issues faced by real world clients and target user groups they are also being prompted to consider how they, as graphic communicators engage with the communities and environments of which they are a part. By placing a significant focus on the contextual setting of the discipline and profession, the programme provides opportunity for students to consider how their individual critical and creative practice relates to wider social, economic and environmental agendas. Such an approach successfully aligns the programme with relevant QAA direction: the subject benchmark statements for Art and Design courses (2008) and recent Education for Sustainable Development guidance (2014).

How?

The module content focuses on the application of disciplinary skills in authentic circumstances, guiding the learners' thinking beyond the design studio towards professional marketplace considerations. Staff from the Cardiff Met's Estates department identified nine authentic sustainability issues faced by managers and residents of the university halls of residence. In small groups, the design students were assigned an issue and tasked with identifying a realistic behavioural change solution to the problem and designing an associated graphic communications campaign that promoted the behavioural change among residents of the student halls. In order to do this student groups engaged directly with the Estates staff who became 'project clients' with their own sets of context specific criteria that problem solutions had to adhere to, and the real world 'target user group', the halls residents who the design students interacted with through focus groups. Formal feedback was provided at strategic points within the design process whilst informal feedback was always available to students upon request. Student groups were required to present their proposed behavioural change campaign to one another, module lecturers, industry based mentors and project clients at an end of project event.

Outcomes

By developing and promoting real world solutions to genuine problems that had the potential for implementation and thus achieve a lasting impact, it was clear that the vast majority of students became emotionally invested in their project outputs and developed a strong sense of ownership and value in their proposed solutions and campaigns – evidence of effective experiential learning! Dr. Wendy Keay-Bright noted a high level of student engagement and participation, which was also evidenced in the high standard of assessment submissions. Students evidenced a range of applied skills and key outcomes of effective education for sustainable development projects such as this. These included: adaptability and flexibility; criticality through analyses, evaluation and synthesis; research and data gathering; creative problem solving; opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial capacity; networking skills; self-reflection; collaboration, communication and presentation.

