

Institution:	University of Sunderland.
Programme:	BSc Environmental Studies
Module Name(s):	Environmental Issues 1 (GET104) Environmental Issues 2 (GET205) Environmental Issues 3 (GET310)
Activity Name:	The Local Sustainability Project (LSP)
Level/Year:	Case study involves mixed level or 'vertically integrated' students groups from levels 1, 2 and 3.
Learning hours	It represents 100 student learning hours.

Work related learning outcome(s).

Upon successful completion of these modules students will have:

developed and demonstrated their research, group working, communication and reflection skills while contributing to a project with a real world orientation.

There is a differentiation of the learning outcomes between levels. Level 3 students are directed to take a leading role in the project management, level 2 students in data analysis and shaping data collection strategies and level 1 students in field work and basic research.

Description of the teaching activity which achieves the learning outcome(s)

Case study involves mixed level or 'vertically integrated' students groups from levels 1, 2 and 3. The students work in mixed level, small research groups looking at various aspects of sustainable development in collaboration with Sunderland City Council's Local Agenda 21 (LA21) personnel, and other local environment and development agencies. They present their findings at a public conference attended by City councillors, external partners and invited members of their local communities, using posters and presentations.

Rationale for selection of teaching activity

The LSP provides an opportunity for the development of research, group-working, communication and reflection skills. The LSP is particularly helpful in this area, as it is an experience designed to be repeated in each year of the degree. This iterative approach enables students to appreciate the development of their skills, knowledge and in particular levels of responsibility in relation to the other levels of students with whom they are working. The real-world orientation of the project helps students to appreciate the contribution that Environmental Studies can make to society at large. Being exposed to external practitioners offers students insights into what professionals actually do - augmenting other vocational and career-oriented parts of the degree. By being enrolled in a research project that will feed into the City's Local Agenda 21 process, students would hopefully feel that their skills and knowledge base is being put to use in the communities and neighbourhoods in which they live and study.

Assessment – approach and detail (copy of assessment sheet)

After a three month semester, split by the Easter break, each student team is required to submit: (1) a 5000 word joint report on their particular ward; and (2) to present their findings at a public conference attended by City councillors, external partners and invited members of their local communities, using posters and presentations. Each student subsequently has to present (3) an individual diary and reflective critique of their role and output in the exercise. All of the three elements are formally assessed on a 25:25:50: ratio.

Future developments

In preparing the second year of operation, currently being delivered, some structural changes have been made. The roles of the different levels have been made a little more open, with Level 3 students being framed as facilitators rather than managers. Level 3 are also no longer involved in group assessment, and instead produce individual reports that reflect on their facilitating role and also address the substantial academic themes. However, this does mean that the group reports as produced by Level 1 and 2 students will lack some of the critical perspectives and be of less value to practitioners.

Contact details

More details can be found in PLANET, the bi-annual publication of the LTSN Subject Centre for Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences at <http://www.gees.ac.uk/planet/index.htm>

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