Institution:	University of Sunderland
Programmes:	MSc Environmental Management MSc Environment, Health & Safety MSc Health Development Environment
Module:	Research Methods and Data Analysis (RM&DA)
Activity:	Data analysis task using data from a collaborating organisation
Level/Year:	xx
Learning hours:	xx

Work-related learning outcome(s)

The learning outcomes of this curriculum development project include:
- the development of skills which equip students for solving problems in the real world;
- an awareness of the relevance of module elements to local and other organisations.

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

This project is an attempt to improve the learning experience of students on an existing RM&DA module – it's the first module taken by all students on our suite of three MSc programmes. Work-related learning approaches are introduced to counter the impression that the subject is boring and irrelevant. In addition, a variety of learning and teaching methods, coupled with a selected focus, help make the subject less difficult and traumatic.

Real World Involvement – quantitative data analysis
The module sparks interest and motivation in the students by involving local organisations in the provision and presentation of data. Experience gained from another module using this approach had already shown that this employer–student–staff linkage had the potential to yield benefits to all concerned.

For this aspect of the module we needed to find a suitable partner, ideally from a local organisation, who would be willing to work with us and who had suitable data for use by the students in their data analysis tasks. From several possibilities, we chose an enthusiastic partner from a local health organisation who offered a large volume of health data relating to breathing disorders. The data was anonymous so that there was no problem with confidentiality.

The intention was to involve students with a real organisation, identifying real problems and issues, analysing real data and producing valuable results.

Real World Involvement – qualitative data analysis
As part of the qualitative data analysis section of the module students have in the past carried out an exercise in the use of participatory appraisal techniques. We would ideally have preferred to work with 'live' data. However, in the absence of an appropriate external situation we decided to apply the technique to investigate an issue that is of importance to the management team of the MSc programmes. The chosen subject was: what experiences and impressions did the student group have of the MSc programmes so far?

Rationale for the selection of the teaching activity

Real World Involvement – quantitative data analysis
As one of our initial aims was to address the perceived irrelevance of the subject matter, this link was very useful in that it allowed the students to see the real world context of their work and to realise that their problem solving methodologies could be applied in the work place. This new link with a local organisation proved to be a big benefit to the module.

Real World Involvement – qualitative data analysis
Because the subject matter of the qualitative data analysis was of immediate importance to the students, they were motivated and keenly interested in both the subject matter and the effectiveness of the investigation technique (participatory appraisal) for the task in hand. The participatory appraisal 'live' exercise was probably the most successful intervention in the module. It thoroughly countered the problems of boring, irrelevant subject matter.

Assessment – approach and detail

The assessment involved each student carrying out a data analysis task using data provided by the collaborating organisation.

Future developments

One of our aims was to make the data used in the module as live as possible. This objective proved to be rather difficult to achieve in practice. Ideally we wanted to find an employer who had a suitable data set that they wanted to be analysed. This would have given the students the added satisfaction of being involved in data analysis that needed to be done and which would produce results valuable to the employer. In the event we had to make do with real data that had already been analysed – it was real, recent and important, but not 'live'. The students benefited from working with this data but did not experience the added sparkle of the 'live' data factor.

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