

# Using Field Trips to Teach Research Methods

## TQEF Research informed Teaching Project

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# HEFCE Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund

## Research informed teaching (RiT)

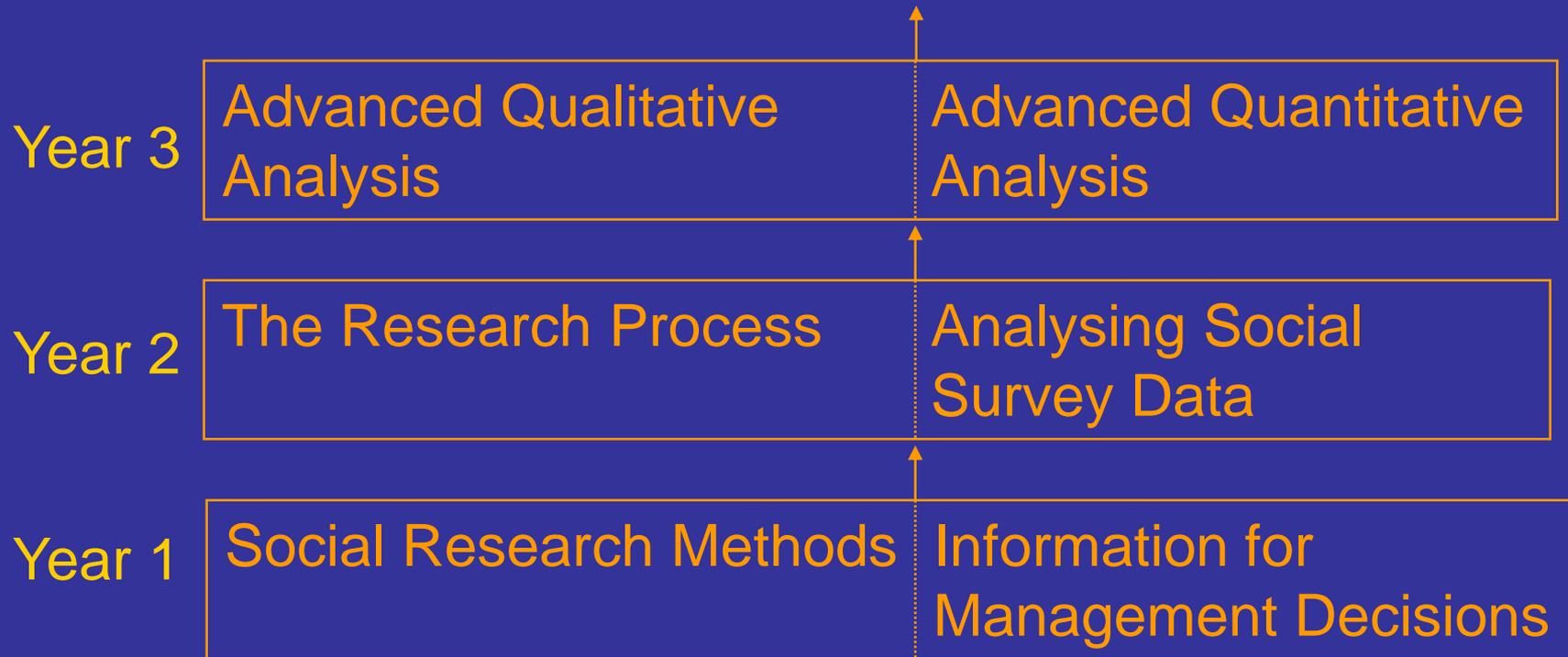
- Students learn about discipline based research
- Students learn to do research
- Staff participation in pedagogic research
- Students active participation in research

(UOP Draft Learning & Teaching Strategy, 2008 p 12-14)

# Background

- Undergraduate minor programme in Social Research
- Specialist modules (2 x 20 credits Stages 1, 2, & 3)
- Combine with Sociology, Criminal Justice Studies & Criminology, Politics, International Relations.

# **BSc (Hons) Major Subject with Social Research PLUS Market Research Society Advanced Certificate in Market and Social Research**



# Why a pilot field trip?

- Field trips not historically offered to Sociology or Social Research.
- Would it engage our students?
  - Benefit student learning
  - Go beyond surface learning
  - Present a challenge to reflect on social setting of research – uniqueness of N.I. context.
  - “Get their hands dirty” to challenge notions of the ‘ideal’ research project
  - Gain an understanding of real world research.
  - Link to MRS Code of Conduct
  - Personal Development Planning (PDP)
- Additional benefits
  - Add to ‘the offer’.
  - Benefit marketing / recruitment
  - Embedded into other social science disciplines
  - Staff PDP in relation to planning, executing and reflecting on field work

# RiT Project Aims

1. To establish a Field work element to Stage 2 Social Research Minor Pathway.
2. To establish best practice from existing field work modules run at UoP
3. To run a pilot as part of the existing Stage 2 embedding within the existing two 20 credit module 'The Research Process' and 'Analysing the Social Survey'
4. To evaluate the field trip to establish if a field work trip could be incorporated into the existing structure or as a separate module.
5. To enhance the attractiveness and added value of a degree incorporating Social Research.
6. To explore linkages with other programme developments for example MSc Social Research Work Based Learning placements (with Alison Green).

# What did we want from a field trip ?

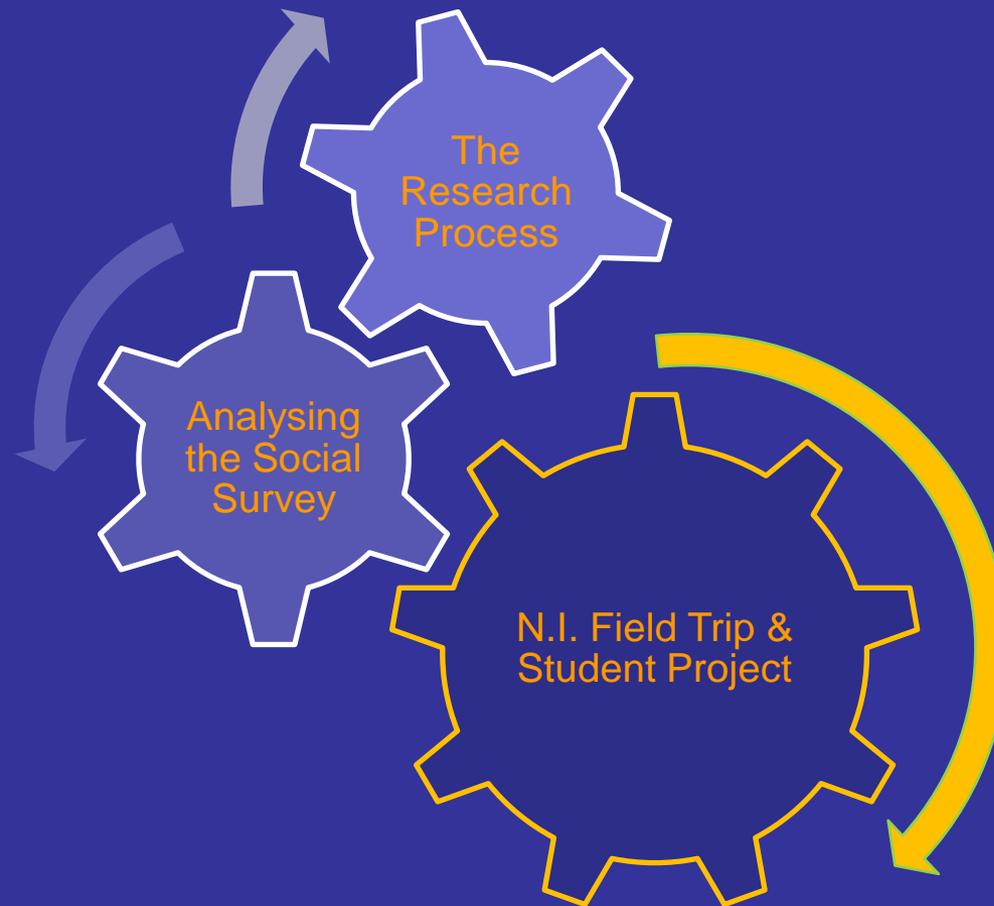
- For students to:
  - To develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of all stages of the research process.
  - To gain an understanding of the various factors that contribute to the running of a successful research project.
  - To develop an understanding of applied social research in an organizational setting.
  - To gain practical experience of professional social and market research data collection techniques.
  - To understand how research is subsequently used in areas such as policy development.
  - To organize, conduct and manage a group based research project.
  - To understand how research is organized in a professional research organization and the employment opportunities available to social research graduates.
- To give our students an opportunity to do something “a bit different”.

“Effective learning cannot be expected just because we take students into the field”

(Lonergan & Andreson, 1988:70)

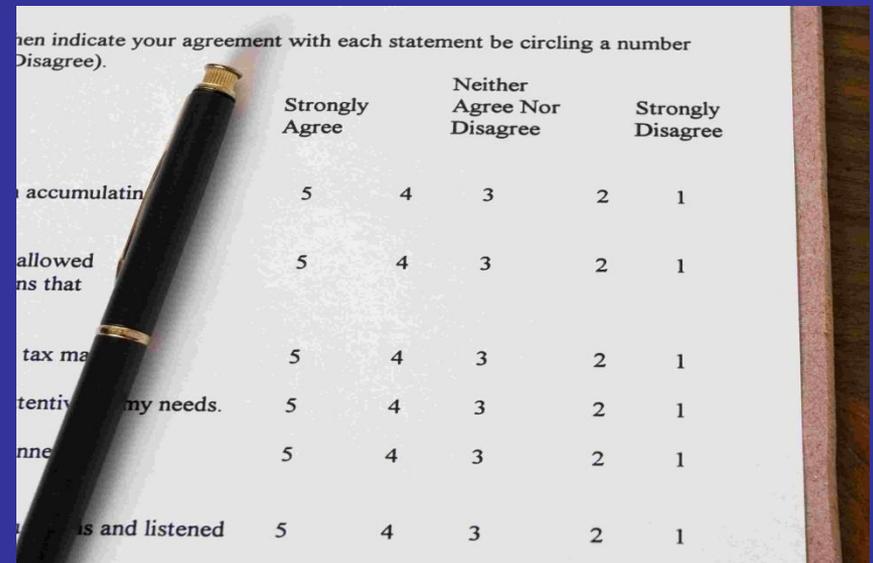
- Need to prepare the students for the field work
- Familiarisation with the environment
- Understanding how work in the field relates to work in the classroom
- Identify and reduce any anxiety

# Field work planning – tweaking the curriculum



# The Student Research Project

- Using virtual information
  - CAIN website to understand NI
  - Evidence from NIO website
  - ARK website and NILT
- Decide on their research question
- Task:
  - To research, design, and execute a small social survey.
  - Group research meetingsTopic: Employment opportunities in Belfast



# Pre-field trip planning

- Approach NILT to run a one day workshop.



## Themes

- In-depth background on NILT – Research Process, Problems and Solutions.
  - Use of CAPI and CASI in fieldwork.
  - Dissemination and links to policy outcomes.
  - Employment opportunities.
- 
- **Guide to provide a historical Social and Political tour of Belfast.**

# Practical Stuff

- Find suitable accommodation.
  - Convenient for the City Centre and QUB.
- Travel arrangements
- Student briefing pack
  - Submission deadline for repro of survey questionnaire
  - Sampling strategy recommendations
  - Police permissions
  - Emergency contact details

# Background of students who went

- Six students registered
- 4 minor Social Research (Major with Sociology, International Relations, Criminology)
- Open to any student who took either of the two Social Research modules as an elective (9 students declined)

# Field Trip (7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

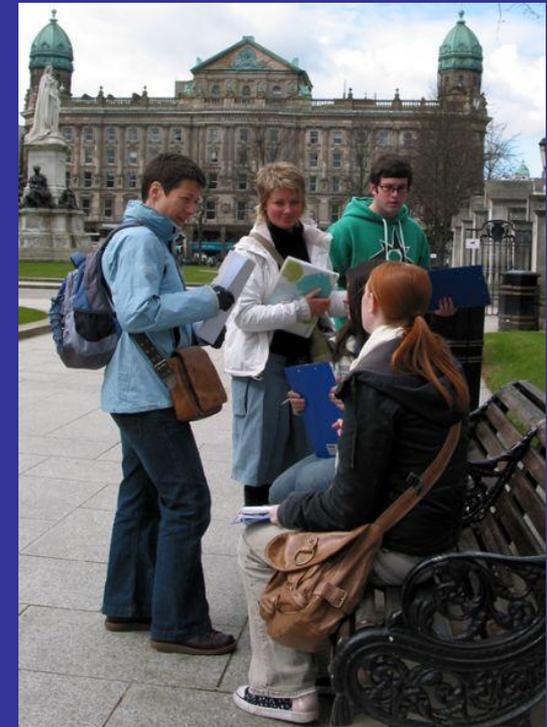
- Day 1.
  - Travel, arrival, hostel accommodation, familiarisation with Belfast City Centre. Evening Meal together
- Day 2
- Queens University Belfast
  - ARK and NILT team (insert programme here with their logos)
  - Evening free. No group meal





## Day 3

- Social and Political tour of Belfast
- Conducted their Street Survey
- Evening meal and pub!



- Day 4
  - Travel back to Plymouth
- Workshop 17<sup>th</sup> April
  - During the week students inputted their data into SPSS
  - Analysed the survey findings
  - Discussed questionnaire
  - What they had learnt.

# Evaluation

The information packs and leaflets they (NILT) provided were very useful and I used them for my research for the assignment

We have detailed using BLAISE in one of our research proposals (coursework) and to see and use it made it 'real' ... and I found (the background detail on NILT) really useful when I came back and I was completing the module assignment



I didn't realise that just one or two people were so involved in it from designing to data input to presenting the results. Actually meeting the Director made you realise how they whole process is steered by just a few people. I thought it was a big department. I didn't know that they worked with field work agencies and experts in the different (research) fields to design the actual questionnaire as well

From where we were staying it (Belfast) seemed like any other City but within 5 mins of the tour starting the guide put what we saw around us into context and set the scene

You could sit in a taxi and see it (murals) and not really know. You could sit in a classroom and be taught it and not really see it, but getting them both together really made the difference

I expected the murals I saw on the internet site to be outside of Belfast I never expected them to be so close to the city centre



The tour was an essential part of the trip, putting everything in to context. I enjoyed being able to chat to the guide

“(It made me think .... ) people have actually lived through it (The Troubles) and gives you (as researcher) an extra sensitivity when talking to people. It was really important to know about before conducting the street survey

Conducting the street survey was real . Some of the people I interviewed had really strong opinions. I think it helped that I wasn't Irish although being English may have caused some bias



It is something I would include on my CV as there is research in every aspect of employment

# Social Aspects

- “We get to know each other in the 2hrs we spend together for the module (each week) but to spend 4 solid days with each other you get to know each other much better.”
- “We got to know the staff better and it makes it easier to contact them in the future if we have a problem/query . The staff seem much stricter (in the classroom) then they did on the field trip !”



# Staff reflections

- “It was really positive to see our students challenged in a different way from the classroom learning approaches we have adopted. Placing students in the field in an unfamiliar environment challenged them to think about the social/situational aspects of conducting research, particularly in a city such as Belfast that has had such a turbulent recent past. The social setting of research is not something that can be easily learnt in the classroom as it has to be experienced. I was pleased when the students said that they were still thinking about what they had learnt two weeks after returning to Plymouth.”
- “It was rewarding that the work undertaken in the University fitted so well with the field trip and that the students were able to build upon their theoretical knowledge and practical skills, and to gain valuable learning experiences.”

# Points for reflection

- Students enjoyed the experience
- Opportunity to
  - Build closer relationships with each other
  - Build more informal relationships with academic staff
- The 'novel' unfamiliar environments and student learning
  - Challenging
  - Reflection on the social setting
  - Deeper learning and understanding – experiential
  - Improvement in communication and social skills
- Future plans
  - Establish a field trip element in the programme – funding?
  - Assessment
  - PDP