

The Science Shop

The Science Shop is a knowledge exchange initiative within the Educational and Skills Development Division which provides opportunities for students to develop their skills by carrying out curriculum-based research projects with community and voluntary organisations. It also enables community and voluntary groups to access the knowledge and information resources of the University through student research work. Typical projects may deal with environmental issues, community health issues, social policy and legal issues.

The Science Shop is also a founding member of the International Science Shop Network and is currently involved in the FP7 funded PERARES (Public Engagement with Research and Research Engagement with Society) project, co-ordinating a work package examining policy developments to support Science Shops and community based research in higher education.

The Science Shop is a collaborative programme with the University of Ulster, funded by the Department for Employment and Learning under the Higher Education Innovation Fund.

PROCEDURES FOR STUDENTS

The Science Shop provides a point of contact between community groups and the University. Community groups submit research ideas to The Science Shop and Science Shop staff find students to carry out the research as part of their course work.

The Science Shop works with undergraduates and postgraduates right across the University who are carrying out research as part of their degree. This includes humanities, social sciences and law students, as well as those studying more traditional science subjects.

The Science Shop works with community and voluntary groups from all over Northern Ireland to develop suitable projects. New topics are submitted throughout the year. A complete list is available on The Science Shop website www.qub.ac.uk/scisho

The Science Shop can work with students to negotiate a project suitable for the amount of time they have and the type of research they need to do. Staff help students break the research down into manageable parts and decide which parts they might not be able to address.

Students are not paid, although some groups may be able to contribute towards expenses.

If students are not interested in any of the research ideas listed, but would still like to do research with one of the groups mentioned, they can contact The Science Shop to discuss their research idea.

The first step for students is to contact The Science Shop and make an appointment to talk to the staff. They then provide some more information about any projects the student is interested in. If the student wants to discuss this further, Science Shop staff attend a meeting with the student and the community group. After this meeting, students, their supervisors, and groups make a final decision about whether they wish to proceed with the project.

PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATIONS

The Science Shop is an initiative run jointly by Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and University of Ulster (UU). The Science Shop works with community organisations who want some research carried out and with students who need to carry out a project as part of their degree, seeking to make a match between the two.

The name Science Shop comes from the original Dutch 'wetenschapswinkel' where science is translated as knowledge. The name reflects membership of an international network of Science Shops based mainly in Universities and supported by the European Commission.

Any community or voluntary sector organisation can use the service.

Science Shop staff talk through the research process and help design the project. If organisations have a project idea that might not be suitable for a student they can still contact The Science Shop where staff will talk through the idea and help decide whether it is a suitable student project. Staff are available to discuss new ideas throughout the year. However summertime is a particularly good time to develop new projects since most students come through at the start of the academic year in October.

Once a project has been discussed, it is placed on the Science Shop database and advertised to students across both universities. It is important that students choose a project that is meaningful to them and unfortunately it is not possible to guarantee that a student will take up a project within a given timescale. However projects are kept on a database unless staff are informed that the information or research is no longer needed.

Students working on projects will normally have had research training and will have a supervisor in the university. They will normally carry out this work as a dissertation or research project which forms part of their degree programme. Science Shop students work on many different issues including policy and legal research, architecture and planning, information technology and environmental issues as well as a broad range of social issues.

If a student is interested in a project, Science Shop staff contact the organisation. If they are happy to go ahead, a meeting is arranged between the community organisation, the student and one of the staff members. At the meeting the general scope of the project is discussed, what needs to be done, what methods will be used and how long it will take. If everyone reaches an agreement, a contract is drawn up between the community organisation and the student. However if either party feel at this stage that they don't want to proceed, it is still possible to withdraw until the agreement is signed.

Students are not paid for the work they undertake through The Science Shop. However if students are likely to incur additional costs through carrying out the project organisations may be asked to make a small contribution towards expenses if this is possible.

If community or voluntary organisations are approached directly by a student from either University of Ulster or Queen's University about a project on The Science Shop list or about a project they want to work on organisations can request that students work through The Science Shop if they want to access group resources. Science Shop staff then help to manage the process and ensure that the organisation gets a final copy of the project when it is finished.

Groups can contact the Science Shop office for an information pack or for an informal chat on how The Science Shop works. They can also meet with a member of staff to discuss research ideas.

For further information please contact Eileen Martin or Emma McKenna on 028 9097 3107 or by email science.shop@qub.ac.uk or see the website www.qub.ac.uk/scisho

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