

Case Study

Real life projects for Masters Students at Queen's University Belfast Science Shop

Activity

Queen's University Belfast has a longstanding Science Shop which brings CSO research needs into the university and connect this to students doing research within the curriculum, carrying out 65 research projects every year. As part of the EnRRICH project, The Science Shop linked with the University's recently established Graduate School to offer Masters students across all disciplines an opportunity to carry out consultancy style research dissertation projects on behalf of external organisations. This was based on a programme in Scottish Universities called 'Making the Most of Masters' (MMM). QMMM is still ongoing and has been mainstreamed in the Management School.



Methodology

An academic working group was set up to enable the development of a community of practice and produce a range of supporting materials for QMMM. Criteria for inclusion in the pilot included: Links with external organisations; Topic development with external partners; Supervision by academic staff with input from partners; Outputs that meet the needs of both parties.

The initial focus was identifying and supporting academic staff. External project ideas were provided and projects mediated both by The Science Shop and by academics.



Learning outcomes

Students appreciated the opportunity to do something other than an academic dissertation. They cited increased employability and having something concrete to highlight in job interviews. Some also felt that it was a good opportunity to give some service to society.

Academic staff highlighted that students learned about different kinds of knowledge, got to apply research skills in real life settings, got an insight into external organisations, and learned something about themselves and their own values.



Conclusions

- Students undertaking projects as part of the curriculum can offer an excellent resource to CSO partners and learn a lot in the process.
- Academics benefit from peer support to problem solve where issues arise from supervision of real life projects
- Resources need to be easily accessible to academics
- A central personnel resource (e.g. Science Shop) is useful to maintain contacts with external organisations, to source suitable projects and support sharing of good practices

Trainers' and Learners' profiles

The Making the Most of Masters pilot was open to all academic areas across QUB. Projects were undertaken as dissertations (worth 30 ECTS). In 2015/16 28 students enrolled from Engineering, Management, Computer Science, Biological Sciences, Planning, and Anthropology.

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