

# QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST SCIENCE SHOP OPERATIONS

## MANUAL

### INTRODUCTION

This manual is a rough guide to the different aspects of running The Science Shop and is a guide rather than a rulebook. The aim is to indicate 'factors to be aware of' before they happen rather than after they have happened. Most of it is based on experience.

The guide is in three parts; the first part refers to the initial meetings, whether it is with the community group or students. This is the most important element of the process as it lays the ground for later work. There follows a section on the development of the request, i.e. things to watch out for as the request progresses. The third section on completion looks at the loose ends that need tidied up.

### GROUPS

#### INITIAL MEETINGS - FIND OUT:

1. **Who wants to know?** This includes both the organisation/group concerned and the person representing the group. In the latter case it can be important to check diplomatically how representative the individual is of the group and it is important to realise therefore that the group may not share the individual's perspective on the question. Also if the person represents a committee it might be useful to check whether and when the committee changes personnel as new members may view the request differently.
2. **What is the question?** Try to agree a written statement of the question - after negotiation this can change.
3. **What are the time constraints?** When does the work need to be completed by? Must it start by a certain date? Does it need to take place at a certain time of the year? Why are these constraints being imposed? Sometimes constraints are set arbitrarily and may actually be negotiable.
4. **Why is this question being asked?** Answering this should include deriving a context for the request. This information is important both in terms of the basic Science Shop criteria and for later use. Being aware of the need for the request will help sell the request, particularly to students.
5. **How might the information be used?** This overlaps with the previous question. However, it is more specific. What will the group do with the results? Is it a possibility or a probability that they can act on the results? More importantly is the person asking the question the same person who will act on the results? This information is important in terms of reporting to the student or academic what happened to their piece of work.
6. **What other assistance is being sought?** If no other help is available will The Science Shop no longer be needed, or is The Science Shop input necessary to make things happen? The Science Shop worker needs to be careful that they don't take on the role of

Community Development Officer - make your skills available and direct them to other resources when appropriate.

7. **Is money available?** This can be tricky, however if money is available then it should be pointed out to the group that The Science Shop is not an attempt to undercut University research services.
8. **What support can be provided?** Will there be a direct contact person for the staff member or student who gets involved and what other inputs can the group make. For example accommodation, travel and provision of office space.

### **POINT OUT TO GROUPS**

1. The Science Shop is an intermediary - we do not answer research questions ourselves except in the most straightforward of cases. We do not 'represent' students or staff.
2. If undergraduates carry out the research the output can have variable standards and there are limitations to what individual students can achieve.
3. There will always be delays before the next action.
4. If any of the groups circumstances change then The Science Shop needs to be kept informed.

Document all of the above information as soon as possible after the initial meeting. Open a new file for the request and store information as per the information systems set up.

### **UNIVERSITY STAFF**

#### **INITIAL MEETINGS - FIND OUT:**

1. **What deadlines the students work to?** When do they finally decide on a project? When will work begin, when can fieldwork take place and when might the final project be delivered?
2. **Any minimum course requirements.** For example, some students need a psychological input into a study, some must use scales in a questionnaire or some may be expected to be placed in the organisation for a period of time.
3. **Extra information requirements** - sometimes academics/students will require extra information in order to answer the question.

#### **POINT OUT**

1. What the question is, what the time constraints are, who wants to know etc - all the information derived from the initial meeting with the community group representative.

2. There may be some scope for adapting the questions; breaking it up if it is too complicated, adding parts in if it is too simple. This is important as students may get bogged down and feel if they cannot answer the exact question then there is no point in doing the project - this is not the case.
3. The role of The Science Shop is to ensure the smooth running of the project and acting as a reference point to both the community group and the student/academic if there are any difficulties.

## **STUDENTS**

### **INITIAL MEETINGS - POINT OUT**

1. There is support available from The Science Shop and the community or voluntary group to help the student while they are carrying out the project.
2. There are special circumstances and considerations for working with community and voluntary groups and on a real request. The question can change and develop. The need to develop good working relationships might also be referred to and remember, personalities will vary from request to request.
3. The advantages of working directly with a community group on a project
  - Helping the community
  - Answering a real question
  - Having the support of The Science Shop and the group
  - Seeing the results of their labour put to use
  - Unlocking data

### **DEVELOPING THE REQUEST**

#### **Important things to remember**

1. Write everything down - there are too many requests to keep details in your head. Record who rang whom, what they said, what information they said they would forward etc. Send written confirmation of any agreements made over the phone.
2. Most things can be renegotiated - if an aspect of a request presents problems (timing, location, size etc) explore other possibilities.
3. People will not always return your phone calls - call again after a few days, be persistent.
4. Do not put all your eggs in one basket - although a good initial contact may have been made it is good practice to make other contacts.

5. Emphasize the name The Science Shop - representatives of community groups may sometimes think of you as an academic and the academics may see you as part of the Centre for Social Research.

#### **UPON COMPLETION**

1. Keep evidence of what was produced. A copy of the completed project is to be passed on to the commissioning group and a copy kept in The Science Shop archives.
2. Notify interested parties of completion.
3. Let the students and academics know what the information was used for.
4. Arrange publicity if desired.