STUDENT COMMUNITY RESEARCH

A Practical Guide

What is Student Community Research?

Student Community Research (SCR) is the term we've adopted at the University of Brighton to describe our work supporting students and partner organisations to collaborate on research projects. This forms one element of our student community engagement programme, and constitutes one of a suite of services the Community University Partnership Programme (Cupp) offer to community organisations. Whilst there is a tradition within certain courses of creating opportunities for students and community partners to collaborate on research (usually via dissertations), to date this has operated in an informal, ad-hoc way, with a variety of processes involved in overseeing such work. Cupp seeks to develop and co-ordinate this activity, with a view to ensuring a wide range of opportunities are made available within a supportive framework.

Some Universities use the term 'Science Shop' to describe such activity. Students have been involved in conducting research for or with community organisations as part of their undergraduate and post graduate degree programmes since the early 1970's. The Science Shop (SS) movement, originating in Holland, started as an informal, student led initiative to mediate mainly scientific research projects and provide a neutral, academic view on outcomes. Since then Science Shops have been set up in Germany, Sweden, Rumania, Wales and Ireland and spread to include the humanities and social sciences.

As with other areas of our student community engagement, the SCR strand is underpinned by the core philosophy of mutual benefit and knowledge exchange. Through the provision of a supportive framework and robust processes, each party can be clear about their expectations, working together towards mutually beneficial outcomes. Students are not paid for the work they undertake through SCR. However, if additional costs are incurred for the student whilst carrying out the research, a contribution may be negotiated within the formal agreement drawn up with the community partner.

In relation to identifying appropriate organisations / projects for students to work with, SCR in general apply two principles:
(Adapted from Living Knowledge web-site, criteria for science shop clients http://www.scienceshops.org/)

1. Partners may not have the (full) financial means to acquire their research by other means (sometimes applicable questions from these clients are accepted as paid research or research at least subsidised by the client)
2. Partners should have no commercial objectives with their question, and the research results must become public (or 'the question must be for the common good');

Why do Student Community Research?

We believe that SCR can result in a number of benefits for the various parties involved:

For Community Partners:
* An opportunity to develop/refine a research proposal.

- An additional, cost free, resource to enable research to take place.
- Access to academic knowledge / experience within their field.
- Access to students' energy, enthusiasm and ideas.

For students:
>
> An opportunity to:

- Apply research theory into practice (including working within the various constraints of the partner organisation such as financial/human resources)
- Develop transferable skills (such as negotiation, interpersonal, communication, self-motivation, time management)
- Work on projects with local impact
- Move outside the university and link into local networks
- Develop contacts, and potentially referees, for future work.

For the University:
>
> An opportunity to:

- promote and support public access to academic knowledge and skills
- support Corporate Plan's commitment to delivering socially purposeful education and to engagement and collaboration *'with the cultural, social and economic life of our localities'*
- create equitable and supportive partnerships with community organisations
- Experience the potential of knowledge exchange (to understand the rules of different partners - practitioners, students and academics, in the creation of knowledge)

How does it work?

- *Research questions identified*

  Cupp canvas community partners and populate a database with appropriate research opportunities. Students are made aware of the database via presentations at dissertation events and via a network of tutors representing various schools. Community Partners are encouraged to send ideas for research projects into the Helpdesk Manager (*01273 643229*) providing details on:
  - ➢ The organisation
  - ➢ The role or kind of project
  - ➢ The kind of student this would work for (or general discipline area)
  - ➢ A contact person who would take this forward

- *Student identified*

  In general, research projects are undertaken by Post Graduate students due to their greater degree of experience and flexibility. However, in certain circumstances, it might be appropriate to involve undergraduate students. If a student is interested in a particular opportunity, they then liaise with their Academic Supervisor to ensure it would be a suitable subject for their studies/level. Once this is established, the student contacts Cupp *(on 01273 643004)* who will facilitate a meeting with the organisation.

- *Negotiation / agreement*
  If agreement is reached between the organisation, the student and their academic supervisor on the subject of the research, methods, time-scales etc an agreement (see appendix I) is drawn up which provides a mechanism for expectations and potential ethical issues to be explored, and outputs to be agreed.

From this point in, it is the responsibility of the student and the organisation to arrange how and when they will contact each other and work together. However, Cupp is available for support and advice to help address any problems that might arise. This could include additional mentoring for students, support for tutors supervising community projects or guidance for community partners.

Things to consider in relation to student community research:

The benefits of taking part in SCR have been outlined above. However, in order for the experience to be satisfactory for all parties, a number of issues need to be considered:

- Management of expectations
- Timing
- Roles and responsibilities
- Communication/supervision
- Research outputs
- Ethics procedures

Managing Expectations
Organisations will be supported to understand the parameters of SCR when submitting a research question for the database. If an organisation has little experience of the research process, it is easy to have unrealistic expectations of the breadth and depth achievable with limited resources.

Experience both within this university and others highlights the importance of ensuring that both organisation and student expectations are realistic and agreed. At times enthusiasm for the subject area / research question can lead to unrealistic outcomes being anticipated. Therefore, the initial facilitated meeting, and subsequent communication between the organisation and the student, needs to explore thoroughly the scope of the research (by way of sketching out a research proposal) which can form the basis of the formal agreement. This process will help focus minds on time-scales, resources, availability of data, ethical issues etc which will impact on the research plan and process.

Experience also indicates that partner organisations often have a different understanding of the nature and purpose of research than that held by universities. For example, they may want to include the outcomes of a piece of research in a funding application and so may want findings presented in that light. These expectations surrounding final use of the findings need to be explicitly discussed at the start of the process.

Timing

Students need to be clear when negotiating with an organisation about their availability and deadlines. At times organisations stipulate a particular point in time by which the research needs to be completed (perhaps linked to funding cycles) which might not fit with academic timetables.

A successful research project needs commitment and time from both the organisation and the student. To help both think through their separate milestones and deadlines they are advised to work together on completing the Gant chart on the research agreement form in Appendix 1.

Clarity around roles and responsibilities
At the agreement stage, the student needs to ensure that the organisation has a clear process for providing suitable support as well as identifying supervision within the university.   It is possible, though rare, that competing priorities emerge from the two, and mechanisms should be in place for resolving any such conflicts. Again this is an area that Cupp can advise on and supervisors and students should seek support sooner rather than later if conflicts become apparent.

Agreeing communication / supervision patterns
Clear processes for communication (such as regular meetings put in diaries at the start of the process) will provide a mechanism for continued dialogue, updating on progress and problem identification and solution. Despite initial agreements, the research process can often highlight unforeseen issues which may require the agreement to be revisited and re-agreed.

Agreement on research output/s
In some circumstances, the agreed output is a copy of the student dissertation. In others, an organisation may request a summary of the dissertation, written with funders in mind, or a presentation to the Board or perhaps a bulleted list of specific recommendations. This may be in addition to or instead of an academic dissertation. In either case, it is crucial that research outputs are discussed and agreed at the signing of the agreement stage and before the research is started. This allows both parties to manage their time effectively.

Ethics procedures
With regard to SCR projects, it is essential that potential ethical issues are identified at the earliest possible stage of negotiation with the organisation. Students and academic supervisors must communicate clearly and effectively with their partner organisation on this, highlighting the fact that ethics approval can be a lengthy, drawn out process (dependent on the research focus of course).
Schools have various mechanisms for reviewing research proposals, and students and supervisors should therefore check with their Head of School or Head of Research to see what processes are in place in their School.

Supervisors, together with the organisation's lead on the research, are in the best position to advise students regarding possible ethical issues and hurdles it may imply. Creativity in the choice of appropriate research methods, in anticipation of possible ethical issues, can

sometimes help avoid delays. This is likely to be more of issue when collaborating with an organisation working with vulnerable people.

What support can Cupp offer?

The Cupp team can offer support to SCR by providing the following:
- Relationship building with organisations
- Assisting organisations to articulate their research needs
- Co-ordinating a database of research opportunities
- Attendance at dissertation events to introduce students to opportunities
- Facilitate initial meeting between organisation and student
- Run Action Learning Sets (see appendix 3) as support mechanism for students involved in SCR

Risk assessment & Health and Safety

In addition to ethical issues needing consideration in relation to the research activity, health and safety of the student must also be addressed. Most community and voluntary organisations will have their own procedures for risk assessment and will be used to using volunteers in their work. For university purposes we ask students to fill in a health and safety checklist with a representative from the organisation in which they will be based (where appropriate). This is good preparation for them in considering the things they might come up against and can be found on the Brighton University website: http://staffcentral.brighton.ac.uk/xpedio/groups/Public/documents/staffcentral/doc004676.pdf.

Helping students to understand in advance the different cultural environment of the group they will be working with is also crucial in this context. Dress codes, body language, terms of respect and familiarity may be very different from those used in an educational environment and briefing students on this and on the client group involved can minimise the risk of a project going wrong.

Student Community Research, Expectations of Partners.

This contact is between: *name…………………………, course…………………………,*
The Community University Partnership programme at the University of Brighton and
Name………………. role……………Organisation.

It constitutes the research/media production agreement and the schedule and responsibilities associated with this as well as the rights associated with the final product.

Scope of Project
The project consists of:

Insert aims, objectives, and methods to be used in research

Resources associated with this Project
In order to complete this project the following equipment and resources are necessary. These will be supplied as indicated.

Specify here any resources that are needed for completion of the project in terms of equipment or expenses and who will be responsible for supplying these.

Time schedule agreed for this project
In order to complete this project in a timely fashion we agree to work to the following milestones.

Date	Milestone	Person Responsible	Notes/Risks

Communication strategy for this Project

In order to ensure the full involvement of all parties in this project we agree to communicate at the following intervals and in the following ways.

Insert here details of how and when you will communicate with each other, e.g. weekly phone calls, monthly minuted meetings, etc. and any incidences where you cannot proceed without contacting the other (e.g.: in agreeing to expenses etc).

It might be helpful to specify what needs to be communicated in writing, what is sufficient by email and when or how often you need to meet.

It might also be useful to indicate who to contact if one of the key specified contacts is not available:

First contact at organisation _____ First contact at University _____

Second contact at organisation _____ Second contact at University _____

Expected outputs from this Project

We acknowledge here that different parties have different expectations from this project in terms of both experience and products. We have agreed to work together to try and produce the following.

Indicate here the separate outputs each party expects from this project. This could include a research report, a full dissertation, a summary of outcomes, a presentation to the board of an organisation, learning around a particular area of the production of a piece of media or art work.

Ownership of products associated with this Project.
We acknowledge that each party will have intellectual property rights associated with the following products and once this project has finished can use them as they wish. We expect the following acknowledgement as specified below.

You may wish to specify this in relation to the separate products of this project, e.g. the thesis, the research report or the DVD etc. You might specify the conditions in which it can be use, any restrictions or requirements on the period of time in which it is viable or acknowledgements necessary.

Organisation   **Student**
Name: **Name:**
Date: **Date:**

University of Brighton/Cupp
Name:
Date:

University Ethics Procedures

The overarching structure is a three-tier ethics and governance review system. The first tier consists of initial scrutiny of research proposals at School level. This should include a review of the quality of the proposed research and identification of any ethical issues and consideration as to how they have been addressed. It should also include an assessment of the potential ethical risks to determine whether or not the proposal should be referred up for Tier 2 review by a Faculty Research Ethics and Governance Committee {FREGC} (i.e. those proposals which have been identified at Tier 1 as presenting more than minimal ethical risk). In addition, NHS related proposals may need to go through NHS Ethics and Governance processes but relevant FREGC will advise. (See web-site for further guidance on this: https://staff.brighton.ac.uk/ease/ro/Pages/EthicsGov.aspx). Tier 3 is the University Research Ethics and Governance Committee (REGC) which acts mainly as a top level policy, strategy and monitoring body for matters concerning research ethics and governance.

Supervisors and students should ensure they are familiar with relevant guidance and requirements at the earliest possible stage of planning a project.

Action Learning Sets

Action learning can be seen as a process whereby people join together to learn themselves out of their problems. At its best an action learning set is a learning community where the members want each other to succeed and where they support or challenge each other's ideas and actions from their assessment of what will be most helpful. It involves cycles of group reflection and personal action to learn from experience in order to act more wisely. (Bourner, T, 2004, ALTogether Programme material).

Who to contact:

Dr Juliet Millican
Deputy Director (Academic)
Community University Partnership Programme
University of Brighton
01273 644155
J.Millican@brighton.ac.uk