

Science Shops

Kim Treasure outlines an exciting approach to research in the HE sector in Wales, which offers an example of the way in which the greater ease and speed of movement from idea to action in the devolved nations can not only connect academia to the so-called 'real-world' in a way which is all too rare but also provide a model for similar projects throughout the UK.

Science Shops Wales (SSW) is an innovative pan-Wales community-based research project funded by the Welsh Assembly Government, and channelled through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Strategic Development Fund. The central hub of SSW is based at the University of Glamorgan. SSW is grounded in the socio-political context of a post-devolution Wales, and is particularly oriented towards the Assembly Government's commitment to tackling climate change, and supporting sustainable development. The purpose of SSW is to provide mechanisms for Welsh Higher Education staff, students and researchers to respond to the knowledge needs of Welsh civil society. Science Shops Wales aims to support partnership working between Welsh Universities and civil society organisations in order to build equitable, democratic and sustainable responses to the challenges facing Wales in the

21st century. Wales is one of a small group of nations who are funding community-based research projects at a national level, and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) is one of only three governments which has embedded sustainable development considerations into all legislation. The innovation of WAG in funding such a community-based resource, shows how devolution facilitates an advanced perspective which in turn provides direct links between Welsh HEIs and the needs of local communities. Institutions have often engaged in community and public affairs either as a 'tick box' exercise, or purely in relation to PR or marketing agendas, all very 'top down' models. Science Shops Wales moves beyond these perspectives into a genuine 'bottom up' collaborative approach to problem solving, particularly by assisting communities in developing resilience and adaptation programmes in response to the threat of climate change.

Science Shops Wales works in a number of ways:

- By supporting implementation of HE policy by linking together the three missions of a modern university; teaching, research, and "third mission", i.e. knowledge co-creation and engagement with civil society
- By assisting universities and third sector organisations to align themselves to the longer-term strategic aims of the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Higher Education sector
- By assisting, through various activities, in the development and delivery of policies and programmes to help communities adapt to climate change
- By supporting universities which are aligning themselves to UK and EU policy on public engagement with science, technology and the knowledge economy
- By assisting in the implementation of a number of

Wales



cross cutting WAG policies including inter-University collaborations, sustainable development, One Wales, Widening Access, Lifelong Learning, and others

- By providing an enriched experience of higher education for students through the Student Research Service, by supporting opportunities to develop transferable skills through accredited participation in community-based projects
- By working with a range of civil society organisations such as regeneration and land trusts, schools, charities and NGOs, and smaller informal networks based within a given locality or around a community of interest

The principal activities of Science Shops Wales include:

- Running an ‘engaged learning’ brokerage hub which matches undergraduate and postgraduate students to

external organisations seeking assistance with short and medium term research projects.

- Conducting bespoke research with civil society organisations using in-house and contract researchers
- Both pro-actively and reactively organising and/or delivering workshops and training for civil society organisations
- Collaboration in regional and national level research and knowledge transfer initiatives involving national and local government, Assembly Supported Bodies, UK-funded agencies, NGOs, and other civil society organisations

Often these activities overlap in multiple ways in varying combinations within projects.

A selection of case studies from Science Shops Wales Collaborations include:

- The development and delivery of a biodiversity audit, where

local people were trained to conduct much of the audit themselves. Science Shops Wales has produced a free ‘How to conduct a community biodiversity audit’ resource book.

- Curriculum development and community-based delivery of courses in ‘basic research skills’ and ‘science policy and engagement’. These courses are aimed at mature students and designed as an alternative pathway into higher education.
- In partnership with the Local Authority Association, SSW recruited, trained and supported researchers to collect data on the impact of extreme weather events in Wales. The data collected will help local authorities in Wales to assess appropriate resources and necessary infrastructure development. ►



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Further examples of Science Shops can be found through the Living Knowledge Network, the international network of Science Shops.

For further information on Science Shops Wales contact Kim Treasure, Strategic Development Officer at kafitzge@glam.ac.uk or visit www.scienceshopswales.org.uk

For further information on the international Living Knowledge Network go to: www.scienceshops.org



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Kim holds a B.Sc. and M.Ed., and has a background in community engagement and supporting the participation of communities underrepresented in public and policy fora. Following a career in community education projects in the NGO sector, Kim moved into working in higher education as a Community Engagement Manager in a research intensive university. Kim is now Strategic Development Officer for the Science Shops Wales Network where she focuses on developing pan Wales participatory student research services, and supporting Welsh universities to develop their own science shop. Kim has presented peer assessed papers in America, UK, Continental Europe and the Republic of Ireland, her research interests include the impact of public engagement, and HEIs' motivation and processes for public engagement.

- ▶ Through the Student Research Service, an MBA student from the Glamorgan Business School assessed the potential for developing a disused church into a local tourist centre, complete with bicycle rental services. The final report forms the basis of the student's dissertation, and helped to inform a regeneration trust's decision to develop tourist services as an income generation scheme.
- In collaboration with WAG, SSW organised and coordinated a series of climate change consultation events for civil society organisations which resulted in the establishment of new regional networks to identify effective climate change adaptation practice.

Science Shops Wales is an innovative and exciting national project within the UK higher education sector; with the exception perhaps of Canada and The Netherlands, centralised funding from government for community research units is rare. Such action is an exemplar of how to make efficient use of limited resources while supporting genuine democratic participation and social justice, a far cry from the 'deficit model' traditionally found in many institutions and universities. The model of SSW is also an exemplar of 'joined-up' working. Science Shops models do vary according to local factors, not least due to funding streams. Currently there are science shops in over 24 countries worldwide.