Connecting Communities and Curriculum
Trinity Knowledge Shop

About the Initiative
The Knowledge Shop is a pilot initiative which enables community organisations with research questions to link in with students undertaking research projects in a structured way. In April 2011, University Council endorsed a recommendation to develop such a mechanism in light of strategic commitments to enable civic engagement by students and staff and to maximise opportunities for learning outside the classroom.

The Civic Engagement Officer worked with academic staff from seven disciplines (Business, Occupational Therapy, Drama, Sociology, Nursing, Public Health and Primary Care and Psychology) to identify and define the parameters of opportunities for community research to be undertaken within the curriculum. The Civic Engagement Officer then put out a call for research questions to community organisations. Further to conversations with twenty organisations, twelve project briefs were identified across three disciplines for the first year of the pilot. Six of these were undertaken as dissertations by final year students of sociology (see Table below). Phase II of the pilot is now underway with twenty-four possible research projects identified across at least five disciplines and all faculties.

Benefits
● Community organisations gain research capacity and an outside perspective through a structured engagement with the University.
● Students learn and apply practical field research skills.
● Students get a foot in the door of the community sector, build experience of a professional environment and build networks and identify potential referees.
● Student dissertations are of impact beyond the academic grade obtained.
● Students enjoy the experience.

The participation of all students, supervisors and community organisations is gratefully acknowledged.

Challenges
● Centralised support is needed for coordination, mediation and monitoring.
● Community research questions may be seeking confirmation of an agenda and more focused on outputs than the process.
● There may be additional pressure on students since the stakes are higher.
● Quality outputs cannot be assured.

Tips for Colleagues
● Topics that work best are non-urgent, discrete and manageable pieces of work which are useful to the organisation and will likely still be relevant in a year’s time. They should not require too much prior knowledge and be flexible enough to accommodate academic requirements.

● Students need to understand standards of professionalism, communication, sensitivity, independent approach / critique expected. This should be discussed at an initial meeting between the student, supervisor and community contact.

● Students should make available an extended abstract / condensed report with key findings and recommendations to the community organisations around the time they hand in their dissertation. The full research thesis should also be made available once it has come through the examination process.

Topics

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Community Partner</th>
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<td>Experiences of racism</td>
<td>Immigrant Council of Ireland</td>
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<td>Timed out student migrants</td>
<td>Crosscare</td>
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<td>Refugee women's group</td>
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<td>Music and integration</td>
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<td>Impact of a book exchange</td>
<td>Ballymun Whitehall Area Partnership</td>
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