

Dissertations for Good brief for universities

1. Introduction

Dissertations for Good is a platform connecting undergraduate and postgraduate university students across the UK with organisations that have important questions about environmental, economic or social sustainability. Students turn their education into a force for social good by answering these real-world research questions through their dissertation, research project, or other self-directed learning. Students benefit from this experience by understanding how their subject relates to sustainability, making a tangible positive impact on their community, developing a range of professional transferrable skills, and gaining impressive experience working with a local or national organisation.

By joining Dissertations for Good, students find out about topics of research interest for organisations and are able to make a real difference as a part of their university degree. They can dedicate the time, resource and effort of their dissertation research to a topic that offers an organisation insight and answers to some of the biggest challenges of the 21st century.

2. Membership costs

Membership costs £500+VAT per calendar year for a whole university. The benefits are listed below:

Benefit	Student of non-member university	Student of member university
Use of the website	✓	✓
Active NUS support by suggesting relevant partnerships	✗	✓
Active recruitment by NUS of organisations with research needs relevant to dissertation interests and/or geographical location	✗	✓
NUS staff time on campus to support the scheme (the equivalent of one day)	✗	✓
Marketing materials	✗	✓

A representative from each member university and/or students' union is also invited to take part in the regular feedback calls, helping to shape the future direction and development of the programme.

Membership of Dissertations for Good also entitles non-academic departments of the university to use the Living Labs Route. A living lab is a research concept defined as a 'user-centred, open-innovation ecosystem'. For the purposes of Dissertations for Good,

the Living Labs Route gives non-academic departments of a university the opportunity to propose research to be undertaken by students at that university.

3. General information

More detailed information is sent when a partnership is created.

3.1. The student is responsible for:

- Completing the project in a timely and professional manner;
- Updating the organisation and NUS on the progress of the project regularly, most likely following regular meetings with supervisor;
- Submitting their report as usual for a dissertation project and subsequently making the report available to the organisations, as agreed in the planning meeting.

3.2. The university, faculty and/or supervisor is responsible for:

- Advertising and publicising the website and specific projects to students, if appropriate and applicable, using the template resources provided by NUS;
- Ensuring that the project is of a suitable standard for the student and that it fulfils the requirements of the course;
- Supporting the student as with a usual dissertation/research project;
- Making the report available to the organisation (depending on responsibilities agreed during the planning meeting).

3.3. The organisation representative is responsible for:

- Agreeing the parameters of the project in the planning meeting, taking into account the fact that it is a student project and their course requirements must come first;
- Providing necessary data and information to enable the student to conduct the project;
- Providing feedback to NUS upon request on how the research was used.

3.4. NUS is responsible for:

- Managing and monitoring the website;
- Suggesting partnerships to members based on areas of interest, questions and ideas;
- Providing communications about and helping access learning and networking events and opportunities, e.g. the British Conference for Undergraduate Research (BCUR; www.bcur.org.uk) and the annual NUS Sustainability Roundtable;
- Providing a detailed partnership outline to show the breakdown of responsibility;
- Providing template documents, e.g. for the planning meeting agenda;
- Publishing abstracts of all completed research on the Dissertations for Good website;
- Monitoring student progress, collating impact and celebrating outcomes.

3.5. Other information

- The student must fulfil the requirements for their module. This is the most important aspect to be taken into account and it will be the responsibility of the academic supervisor to ensure that the project meets the requirements.

- The type of report delivered by the student may differ from that provided by, for example, a professional consultant. The organisation accepts this when they sign up.
- When a partnership is formed, all members of the partnership:
 - Agree to assist NUS with the monitoring and evaluation element of the programme by completing evaluation surveys and adhering to the agreed feedback timeline.
 - Agree to protect personal data obtained through the programme in accordance with the Data Protection Act and to safely dispose of all personal data upon completion of the Programme.
 - Have the right to publicise and promote their partnership and project (with reference to Dissertations for Good).
 - Have the right to present and publicise scientific reports and findings in national/international conferences and research journals (with reference to Dissertations for Good).
- If no student accepts the opportunity to work on this project, the university/faculty and organisation will be able to take part in Dissertations for Good in the future with different students and organisations, **without repaying the membership fee**.

4. Experiences of the programme

4.1. Student experiences

Students reported that taking part in Dissertations for Good helped to improve their:

- Communication skills;
- Interpersonal skills;
- Problem-solving;
- Organisation;
- Ability to use initiative and be self-motivated;
- Understanding of environment, social and economic connections.

4.2. Supervisor experiences

Dissertation supervisors felt that:

- They had benefited from the opportunity to promote student research through additional access to conferences and events;
- Students had improved the skills mentioned above, as well as negotiation skills;
- The piece of work has additional responsibility and weight placed on it, so it is important that all partners

"I felt part of something more collaborative."
Student

"Dissertations for Good has given real meaning to my University studies."
Student

"Working for the sake of something greater than my own academic development has given me drive and motivation to work hard."
Student

"It has given me the opportunity to work with really inspiring people and to gain a lot of practical experience that is applicable in a real world setting."
Student

"It's been a lesson [for the student] in the challenges of working in the real world."
Supervisor

"It is a good experience that enhances students' profiles."
Supervisor

are aware of this and that the project is suitable for the student.

4.3. Organisation experiences

Organisations felt that:

- They had benefited from 'increased insight and commitment' from a student;
- They were pleased that they had the ability to give a student the 'opportunity to be involved in this work';
- The partnerships had transformative impacts;
- They had a good impression of Dissertations for Good and associated communications.

"We benefited from a young person who is genuinely interested in the project and the issues facing young people."

Organisation

"It is a good scheme which allows organisations to investigate areas which would normally be beyond their means"

Organisation

"It has really helped us to build working relationships with overseas groups and to develop knowledge of activity that we would not otherwise have had exposure to."

Organisation

5. To find out more...

Please visit the website at www.nus.org.uk/dfg or get in touch on dfg@nus.org.uk.