

CONSUMER POLICY RESEARCH

Introduction

Considerable developments are taking place in consumer policy; new consumer strategies have been set out, new organisations are being established, industry sectors are developing a stronger consumer focus and public policy is continually evolving as a prerequisite for a successful economy. This dynamic and ever changing field is creating new opportunities for academic research and knowledge transfer. Universities, working in collaboration, will be able to contribute more effectively to consumer policy developments in the public and private sectors.

Consumer Policy Research Feasibility Study

The Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (SHEFC) has funded a study to ascertain whether there is a case for establishing a Consumer Policy Research Centre in Scotland. The study, led by Queen Margaret University College (QMUC), is investigating the need to build research capacity in consumer policy that focuses on consumer rights, responsibilities, empowerment and choice.

The scope of the study includes:

- direct consumer policy (protection, food and health, education, empowerment etc);
- consumer interests in other policy areas (environmental, social, public goods etc);
- consumers in modern markets (competition, quality standards, codes of practice, customer satisfaction, complaints procedures etc) and
- consumer policy in the public sector (local government, health etc).

Working in partnership with Abertay University, Glasgow Caledonian University, Robert Gordon University and the Institute of Consumer Sciences, researchers will focus on mapping consumer, public sector and business organisations with an interest in consumer policy, understanding where requirements and opportunities exist for research. A full survey of the Scottish research base will also be completed, understanding where core competencies lie in specialist fields in consumer policy. The researchers will subsequently examine methods of making their findings more accessible to external organisations with an interest in this area.



Queen Margaret University College

EDINBURGH

QMUC Working in Collaboration

QMUC has a clear vision for this project. We want to:

- facilitate engagement between academics and consumer policy related organisations;
- increase networking activities and build an on-line community of interested organisations;
- collaborate more effectively with researchers from other universities and
- create opportunities to raise the profile of researchers in this field.

The project aims to engage the best academics in this field and our advisory group brings together experts from the Scottish Consumer Council, the Food Standards Agency Scotland, the Financial Services Authority, the Scottish Food and Drink Federation, the Office of Fair Trading, Postwatch Scotland, the Centre for Integrated Healthcare Research (CIHR) and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. Our well established relationships with these members builds a sound foundation for effective guidance on research developments.

The future... The Solution... A Consumer Policy Research Centre

If established, the centre will operate within the wider context of EU and global consumer policy and will address policy design and outcomes in the public, commercial and voluntary sectors. It will offer the potential to host innovative, leading-edge research, knowledge transfer and consultancy projects. With a national Consumer Policy Research Centre it is intended that we will be able to raise the profile of research in this field, capitalise on the varied skills of colleagues in different locations and create an effective platform for successful research funding applications.

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