

Developing Global Best Practice for Business Clinics at Universities

PRACTICE GUIDANCE REPORT

A report generated through the Inaugural Global Business Clinic Symposia 2024
Hosted by Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University
in collaboration with the NCEE

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NCEE (National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education) was established over 20 years to support universities to be more enterprising and entrepreneurial. Today our mission remains the same. Our Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities is a network to share practice, to learn from each other and to push boundaries.

Working with Liverpool John Moores University (a leader in this field) we established a symposium in early 2024. From that symposium is this report, which starts the conversation.

We want to see Business Clinics operating in universities across the world.

Business Clinics are an essential component in bridging academia and industry. They enable students to understand issues faced in business, creating entrepreneurial approaches to address challenges and seize opportunities. Business Clinics can offer a rich and immersive learning experience significantly enhancing student skills.

This report shares practical tips on how successful business clinics can operate. To unlock the potential investment is needed in the experience, ensuring that support is in place, objectives are clear and the benefits are maximized for all partners. We hope that you find the report of use, and join with us to create more opportunities in providing real-world experiences to our university students.

Thank you for attending the symposium and contributing to this report by engaging with the discussion, goes to, Sunderland University, Coventry University, Bradford University, Manchester Metropolitan University, Sheffield Hallam University, Harper Adams University, Munster Technological University, Kings College London, University of South Wales, University of Southampton, Ozyegin University, Middle East College, Durban University and Liverpool John Moores University

Ceri Nursaw

CEO National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education



The Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) supports the Business Clinics report and recognises the important work being done by Liverpool Business School and the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education (NCEE) to create connections between students, universities and the business community.

Julie Lilley, CEO at the Federation of Small Businesses, said: “The best practice report for Business Clinics builds on the critical role that small businesses play in employment opportunities for graduates, both within existing small businesses and by inspiring the next generation of UK-based entrepreneurs, and develops the necessary skills amongst the student community to enable their transition into the workforce.”

“Small businesses provide the inclusive workplaces which enable skilled graduates to remain within and contribute to their communities. Inclusive partnerships with small businesses such as those enabled by the Business Clinics are good for jobs, good for communities in all parts of the country, and good for the whole economy.”

FSB is looking forward to a continued relationship as part of Connect to Innovate with NCEE and Enterprise for Life to develop this initiative with Liverpool Business School and continue to grow the connections between universities, students and businesses across the UK.

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Introduction

Over the past 20 years there has been a general acknowledgement that Higher Education (HE) has a dual role to play in the development of graduates. In addition to providing intellectually stimulating learning, we are also required to produce work-ready individuals with the necessary skills to thrive in today's ever changing workplace and global markets.

Connecting students with the practical realities of their fields and evolving workforce, knowing that the jobs they will enter after their studies may not even exist yet is a critical aspect of the university experience. Recognising this challenge, universities have long been exploring new pedagogical approaches to develop students' employability skills, often referred to as 'soft skills' in academic literature. While project-based and experiential learning methods are not novel, they have proven effective in developing employability and entrepreneurial skills among students by encouraging dynamic, reflective application of theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts. Emerging from the concept of experiential learning, student-led business clinics have gained traction as a valuable strategy for enhancing employability and fostering business problem-solving skills, particularly within Business Schools.

To further advance thought leadership surrounding clinical practice and the operational aspects of running such clinics, we initiated, with NCEE, the Global Symposia for Business Clinics. This report draws insights from the event, attended by over 25 academics representing five countries. Attendees ranged from those with practical experience to those seeking deeper understanding of implementing a student-led business clinic pedagogy. The collective expertise and diverse experiences of the participants enabled a rich discussion and the identification of effective solutions pertinent to this pedagogical approach.

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The report presents the findings from the symposia under three headings:

- Clinical practice in business
- Preparing students for Business Clinic projects
- The value of Business Clinics

The findings will be reported as:

- Current practices, policies and resources
- Recommendations: improvement and new areas of practice

As a result of the symposia, new connections are being made between institutions and academics. To further the development of thought leadership in this exciting approach to learning, a Global Network will be created and led by Liverpool Business School in partnership with NCEE.

Current practices, policies and resources

1. Philosophically, the emphasis is on the nature of learning which occurs and the pedagogical approach of 'learning by doing' is a focal point, given its recognised benefits. The business sector has a longstanding tradition of offering placements and internships. Business Clinics and use of live case assessments could be considered in this context.
2. One participant made a compelling comparison to the clinical practice in medicine, where trainee doctors move from a lecture theatre to operating theatre, highlighting the crucial role of practical experience. Unlike medicine, where practical experience is regulated by laws and medical guidelines, the realm of business lacks such strict governance. Consequently, it becomes essential to identify who supports and guides students in the Business Clinic setting. Therefore, the focus must not be solely on exposing students to real-life projects but also on ensuring the quality and depth of the learning experience they receive.
3. Through the Business Clinic, we are integrating students into an academic milieu, equipping them with academic theories and models, ready to apply them in practice in a live project. It was noted that for some universities engagement with practitioners has been through guest lectures and various other forms of activities and, therefore, work is required in this area to bring the engagement with business to the level at which it is happening with some institutions' Business Clinics.
4. Clinics aims to seamlessly integrate engagement into the curriculum and promote a comprehensive dialogue among diverse stakeholders to foster shared knowledge and understanding through experiential learning. This approach diverges from traditional methodologies, where students work independently on projects and later present their findings. Instead, within the framework of a business clinic module, ongoing dialogue is nurtured among clients, academic staff, students, and business mentors.

“The business sector has a longstanding tradition of offering placements and internships. Business Clinics and use of live case assessments could be considered in this context.”



Clinics aims to seamlessly integrate engagement into the curriculum

5. There is an important distinction between a business clinic module and simply presenting the students to a case study. Articulated very clearly below by one participant from the symposium.

'In a traditional case study approach, students are presented with a static scenario or problem that a company faced in the past. They analyse the situation, develop strategies, and propose solutions based on the information given. While this can be valuable for understanding theoretical concepts and applying analytical skills, it lacks the dynamic, real-world interaction and problem-solving skills that are essential in a business environment. On the other hand, a Business Clinic approach offers a more immersive and interactive learning experience. Students are actively involved in the process of identifying and addressing a company's challenges and taking a professional approach to the piece of work.'

“Business Clinics offer an immersive and interactive learning experience. Students are actively involved in the process of identifying and addressing a company's challenges and taking a professional approach to a piece of work”

Some universities use what was described by one participant as a 'halfway house' In this instance a live case study is set by the employer who attends a session to present the case and takes questions from the students. In some cases, the employer sits on the final presentation panel and in one university the employers awards a prize to the group presenting the best solutions/ recommendations.



Mentors play a crucial role in ensuring the feasibility of proposed solutions

6. Mentors play a crucial role in ensuring the feasibility of proposed solutions, thereby enhancing the quality assurance process. While some universities attending the symposium successfully implemented this model, it was noted that access to funding posed a limitation for others. Participants unanimously agreed that embedding business clinic practices within the curriculum facilitates easier access to funding and allows staff to reassess workload allocation to support such activities.
7. The participants reported different approaches of the business clinic
- Embedded into the curriculum, which allows for funding and staff resources.
 - Extra-curricular models were reported to be challenging, particularly in funding and staffing. One participant reported the challenge of getting buy-in from the staff and that having the business clinic recognised at a strategic level would be a positive move to securing funding from their university, rather than being at the mercy of the budget holder setting aside funding for an extra-curricula activity.
 - One participant explained how they had moved their business clinic from extracurricular to being embedded in the curricular as a core module, and in doing so had to deal with students who did not want to be there, whereas when it was extra curricular, students opted into the projects and were more likely to be motivated. The risk is then that students do not submit or produce a consultancy report for a client who has invested their own time in the process and is then dissatisfied with the service.

8. Support for the Business Clinic: An observation made by one symposium participant is that they have observed that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are enthusiastic about engaging with micro-businesses involving students. However, they prefer not to provide excessive guidance. Therefore, students must be effectively mentored by an academic or an additional business consultant, to ensure optimal value for the student while also generating tangible benefits for the business. This approach relies heavily on securing repeat business and maintaining employer satisfaction with the students' accomplishments.
9. The support required from the client may go beyond what they expected. This can cause clients to become disengaged, as they are having to provide too much support and hand holding of the student group. With that additional business mentor support as mentioned in point 8, the quality of the output can be greatly improved, and the time required from the client can be reduced.
10. Support for the student group undertaking the business consultancy projects can go beyond the client, the academic and even the business consultant. AI needs also to be considered, offering a fifth voice in the room.
11. The importance of managing client expectation was recognised by the majority of participants as pivotal for ensuring client satisfaction with the project outcomes.
12. The students' level of study was identified as a crucial factor influencing the outputs. Master's level projects typically exhibited a higher level of analytical depth, citing instances where students conducted advanced market analyses for businesses. When clients engage with both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students, it is essential to communicate in advance the expected differences in output levels. Additionally, clients should be informed of the disciplinary background of the student assigned to their project.

“ Students must be effectively mentored by an academic or an additional business consultant, to ensure optimal value for the student while also generating tangible benefits for the business”



With additional business mentor support, the quality of the output can be greatly improved, and the time required from the client can be reduced

13. Participants were in agreement that Business Clinic practice involves:

- **Client interaction:** Students learn how to communicate effectively with clients, understand their needs, and build relationships. This develops their **interpersonal and communication skills**, which are crucial in any business setting. Also, through client conversations, students will have the opportunity to develop their negotiation skills as they discuss and agree on the project and its outcomes with each client.
- **Needs assessment:** Rather than being given a predefined problem, students work with the client to identify and understand the specific challenges and opportunities facing the business. This fosters **critical thinking, problem-solving and diagnostic skills**.
- **Problem-solving:** Through exercises such as mind mapping and group discussions, students collaborate to brainstorm and develop creative solutions tailored to the client's unique situation. This promotes **teamwork, creativity and innovation**.
- **Team work:** Working in a group encourages students to develop a sense of teamwork. They need to understand their role within the group and how to effectively respond to their peers. At times, things will go wrong, prompting students to consider how best to **manage conflict** among group members. This will also promote resilience.
- **Continuous learning:** As projects progress, students have the opportunity to refine their strategies based on feedback from the client and on their own reflections. This iterative process encourages **continuous learning and adaptation**, essential skills in today's rapidly changing business landscape.
- **Reflection on performance:** This powerful learning tool not only helps students recognise areas for improvement but also fosters a culture of continuous learning and self-awareness. This reflective practice is essential for developing soft skills such as **communication, interpersonal skills and adaptability**, which are highly sought after by employers.



Overall, the business clinic approach provides a rich holistic learning experience that not only helps students develop technical knowledge and skills but also cultivates the essential soft skills and the competencies highly valued by employers. It bridges the gap between theory and practice, preparing students to be more effective and versatile professionals in the real world. The experiential learning environment which can be created where students are actively involved in client interactions, reflection, and feedback, is invaluable for their personal and professional development.

Recommendations: improvement and new areas of practice

1. Have a clear focus on what you want to achieve

Before planning for a Business Clinic type module it is crucial to prioritise and focus on what you want to achieve within the programme or module. Setting clear objectives and expectations will help avoid spreading yourself too thinly and will ensure that the learning experience remains impactful and meaningful for the students. It is also important to have buy-in from other staff members and stakeholders to ensure the sustainability and success of learning experience. Building a shared understanding and commitment to the business clinic approach at a strategic level will help create a supportive and collaborative environment where everyone is invested in the students' learning and development.

2. Build the capacity and the need for a designated support team

In the context of this evolving paradigm, the initial relationship often commences with a clinic that begins on a smaller scale. It is commonly observed across the sector that such initiatives initially attract self-selected students with elevated levels of self-efficacy and a propensity for learning and skill application. Subsequently, when engaging with business clients, these organisations frequently express a desire to reciprocate contributions to the university. Consequently, their expectations are not strictly limited to receiving pro bono consultancy, although such scenarios are not uncommon. It is imperative to remain vigilant against businesses seeking to exploit this opportunity for free student labour, such as cold calling, distributing flyers, or engaging in direct street sales activities. Thus, a dedicated team is crucial to mediate these interactions and maintain a balanced understanding. One participant commented that the sustainability of the clinic and the support it offers to clients, is dependent upon both support and academic staff.

3. Be clear on the difference between a Business Clinic project and paid consultancy

In order to help academics overcome their fear of engaging with businesses, one participant invited other academics to join in the company visits, to instill confidence in the staff and also to make their own connections for projects. There then needs to be clarity and a balance between making the decision of whether the project should be a paid piece of consultancy or a student-led project which is delivered free of charge to the client. In some cases, it could be a piece of research for a member of staff to undertake.

4. Reconsider scope of projects when scaling your Business Clinic

One example reported at the symposium was that their Schools' primary objective is to enhance student learning and improve their employability prospects by demonstrating the application of theoretical knowledge in practical contexts and gaining work experience. As the initiative has been scaled, it has become evident that there are tangible benefits for the organisations and the broader community which the university serves. Consequently, the School is having to refine the scope and expectations of the projects they offer, clearly delineating the capabilities and achievements expected from the students. This approach needs to influence the content of the precursor years in terms of the technical skills and competencies of the students, to enable them to complete a high-quality consultancy piece of work for the client.

5. Ensure you stay connected with your city's and region's need

It was recognised as important that any university embarking on a Business Clinic understands the needs of its region and businesses, so that continued improvements can be made to the offer from the Business Clinic. Across the sector, Business Clinics can vary in what they offer; some may be focused for example on digital, marketing, or sustainability, whilst others offer projects across a broad spectrum of disciplines. There was a consensus across the participants that being demand-led would be the better approach to take, but that it does have its drawback as academic, and mentor support would need to stay aligned to the demand areas.

SMEs have developed a robust affiliation with the Federation of Small Businesses in the UK, who actively engage in networking events, including breakfast seminars and, contribute to faculty-produced content. Attending such events will gain an institution and Business Clinic attention from various business entities, including micro-enterprises, SMEs, and larger corporations, and may produce the consultancy project you require for a business consultancy type module.



In summary, the business clinic approach offers a rich and immersive learning experience which can significantly enhance students' soft skills, technical knowledge, and overall professionalism. By focusing on clear objectives, fostering a culture of reflection and continuous learning, and engaging stakeholders in the process, you can ensure the long-term success and sustainability of your Business Clinic, through evidencing the value to students and the university.

Preparing Students for Business Clinic Practice

Current practices

1. Knowledge and skills

In preparing students for the subject knowledge required to undertake the project, there needs to be alignment of the projects to the theory which students have been taught. As many of the projects will include some form of research, business research skills are a useful skill for students to bring to the business clinic project. It is also important that the Business Clinic is not the first time a student gets to apply knowledge, so you must scaffold the application of theory to practice learning over the preceding years.

2. Group work

Group work is valuable in this pedagogical approach which fosters collaboration, critical thinking, and communication skills among students. However, effective implementation requires thoughtful planning and facilitation. Setting realistic expectations for students that not all teams will function seamlessly all the time. Students need to understand that working and learning as a group is as valuable an experience as undertaking a business consultancy project.

Here are the essential steps to prepare students for successful group work, which were identified by the participants:

Ice breakers

Consider the use of icebreakers or warm-up activities to facilitate introductions, if students do not already know each other. Encourage student familiarity before forming groups, as when students know each other, they collaborate more effectively and the risk of the group breaking up is minimised.

Group Formation

Effective group work requires ongoing support. By preparing students thoughtfully, academics can create a positive and productive collaborative learning environment. For the Business Clinic project this can be facilitated in several ways, so choose the one which suits your situation

- Students often gravitate toward familiar peers or those they have worked with previously. Remind students of any experience of working with their peers. Get the students to reflect on their choice.
- Some students may not actively engage leading to potential group imbalances and probably where most of the student complaints originate from.

- For unengaged students, internal projects are useful. These projects can be sourced within the university, with staff acting as the client who can support the disengaged students. This type of intervention for unengaged students help manage any institutional risk of clients being dissatisfied.
- Use of tests such as the Belbin Team Roles that support students to determine their 'type' within a group. Students can then buddy up with a cross-section of group types to form what should be a more balanced group.

Ground Rules and Team Contracts

Set clear guidelines for the students on what is expected of them when acting as a consultant. Always encourage students to be respectful of individual differences and create an inclusive environment. Then, ask the students to establish ground rules collaboratively, which can form the basis of a team contract. This contract plays a significant role in the process, as it gets the students to commit to working together and being assessed as a team.

Provide a rationale

Begin by offering students a written rationale for group work. Clearly articulate the benefits, such as enhanced learning, diverse perspectives, and skill development. Then, reinforce the written rationale with a verbal presentation. With the students you can discuss the purpose of group work, emphasising its relevance to academic and personal growth.

Use of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Platform and Microsoft Teams

Students upload their group work documents to the VLE, this could be Canvas, Blackboard or something similar. This includes their team contracts and profiles. In most cases face-to-face teaching is the primary mode of communication with Teams serving as a supplementary tool for document sharing and external client communication.

In summary, the proactive approach of introducing the module early and emphasising team commitment through profiles and contracts has positively impacted team formation and collaboration. By continuing to prioritise these practices, students can engage effectively in group work and achieve meaningful learning outcomes.

Managing conflict and unengaged students

Managing conflicts within student groups can be challenging. The example shared during the symposium highlights the delicate balance between fostering collaboration and addressing interpersonal issues.

In the context of group work dynamics and assessment, strategies to address challenges will be required. For unengaged students, internal projects (the “naughty step” projects) can be assigned. These projects are sourced from within the university, to minimise any institutional risk and risk to project client relations. Where a student becomes disengaged during the project the group contract, is the go-to document to remove a student from a group. The academic needs to understand at what point to they remove a student from the group otherwise the engaged students can take matters into their own hands and evict a student themselves which can lead to in-group arguments.

Having a dedicated module leader to handle such situations is crucial. The role involves not only academic guidance but also conflict resolution. Dealing with these matters can be time-consuming, but it ensures fairness and maintains a positive learning environment for the students. In the end, effective communication, clear expectations, and timely interventions play a vital role in minimising disruptions caused by interpersonal conflicts. It is a delicate dance, but one that contributes to a more productive and supportive educational experience for all involved.



*Having a dedicated module leader
is crucial*

Working with business mentors

A well-structured approach to group work, involving a four-way collaboration among students, clients, mentors, and the academic, needs to be established and communicated to all parties.

The module leader primarily focuses on delivering lectures, clarifying assessment requirements, and acting as the central point of contact for students. This then leaves the Business Consultants (Mentors) to support student groups. The mentors can include a mix of internal academic staff and external professionals. Their role is to foster client relationships and guide students toward meeting project briefs. The roles must be made clear to avoid unnecessary confusion. Whilst the role might vary between institutions, one example from the symposium includes:

- Each student team meets with their mentor for half an hour every week.
- During these sessions, mentors provide guidance, address client-related issues, and offer practical insights.
- The focus is on project dynamics, client interactions, and problem-solving.

Not all institutions had mentors in place, but the agreement was that it would be seen as good practice and an excellent way to support the students. The mentors can also offer that external viewpoint to ensure the quality of the output is meeting the needs of the client.

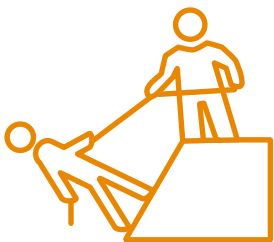
Phrasing of the project brief

The process involves collaboration between business and academic staff.

Project topics are typically generated through a collaborative effort, whilst businesses play a significant role in proposing project ideas based on their real-world needs, challenges, or opportunities, the academic contributes by aligning these ideas with the curriculum, learning objectives and assessment criteria. By working collaboratively on phrasing the project brief this ensures feasibility and maintains educational relevance.

It is not uncommon that initial business proposals require adjustments to fit within the educational context. However, in order that the final project briefs strike a balance, addressing both business needs and student learning objectives, this is an important part of the process.

Finally, it is important that throughout the project, communication remains open between business client, the academic and the Business Clinic support team, so that project topics can be refined or modified based on feedback and evolving circumstances.



A well-structured approach to group work, needs to be established and communicated to all parties

Group Assessment Approach

All group members receiving the same mark can be met with some resistance from students especially if their group is not operating the way they would have hoped for. The main points noted at the symposium included:

Benefits:

- Encourages collaboration and mutual support.
- Recognises that students have self-selected their teams.
- Experienced collaborators tend to perform better.

Challenges:

- Social loafing (unequal effort) can occur.
- Anxiety among students about group work in final year.
- Balancing fairness.

Reflection

The participants at the symposium reported having their students use a range of different reflective models, the common one being the Gibbs model.

a) Gibbs reflective model

Whilst Gibbs model seemed favorable amongst most of the participants, one participant did comment,

“*I have moved away from using Gibbs’ reflective cycle because it primarily encourages students to merely describe events without facilitating deeper reflection or progression.*”

A reminder of the Gibbs model

Gibbs’ Reflective Cycle created by Graham Gibbs in 1988 to give structure to learning from experiences. It offers a framework for examining experiences, particularly repeated experiences, helping students to learn and improve over time. It covers 6 stages:

- **Description** Detailing the experience.
- **Feelings:** Reflecting on emotions and thoughts during the experience.
- **Evaluation:** Assessing what was good and bad about the experience.
- **Analysis:** Understanding the situation and its context.
- **Conclusion:** Drawing lessons from the experience and considering what could have been done differently.
- **Action Plan:** Planning how to handle similar situations in the future or identifying general improvements to be made.

b) Johns Model of reflection

Johns model created by Christopher Johns in 1994 is a model that Johns has continually developed and revised over the last two decades. The model offers another simple framework, that covers two stages:

- Looking in: The student looks inwards to recall the experience they are reflecting on
- Looking out: This is structured around five questions
 - Aesthetic questions
 - Personal questions
 - Ethical questions
 - Contextual questions
 - Reflective questions

“We experimented with John’s approach, which prompts students to consider the “so what” and “now what” aspects of their experiences. While this approach encourages students to think about the implications and future actions related to their experiences, it still tends to focus heavily on description and may not fully support students in developing their reflective capabilities”

c) Rolfe reflective model

The Rolfe et al. (2001) model of critical reflection is a framework developed by Professors Gary Rolfe, Dawn Freshwater and Melanie Jasper. It is known for its simplicity, so it is easy to use across a range of disciplines and consists of three questions.

- **What?**
- **So what?**
- **Now what?**

A common challenge noted is that when using any feedback model with students, there is a risk that it might become a mere repetitive action, lacking genuine thought or learning. It is, therefore, crucial for educators to ensure that students receive proper training on how to effectively use and benefit from their chosen reflective model.

Providing students with a direction for their reflection is thought to be useful within the Business Clinic context: targeted alternatives which prompt students to reflect on specific areas such as group dynamics, conflict resolution, and the application of relevant theories are suggested.

In summary, for these type of pedagogies to be successful, the ‘how to points’ produced in the symposium is not an exhaustive list. However, by having a clear process in place for the project and reflection you can create a supportive environment for both students and businesses and ensure that the output meets the needs of the client.



Providing students with a direction for their reflection is thought to be useful within the Business Clinic context

Recommendations: improvement and new areas of practice

1. Have a clear plan of what your module.

Typical module 20 credit module

Liverpool John Moores University module example

Module Type: A standalone offering, distinct from a traditional dissertation research project.

Credit Allocation: It carries a 20-credit weight, contributing significantly to students' overall academic progress.

This module serves as an alternative to the conventional dissertation, allowing students to engage in practical, real-world projects whilst earning academic credits. The focus remains on addressing business needs and fostering valuable learning experiences.

Lectures and seminars:

- Initial Lectures: The first six weeks include formal lectures.
Topics covered: Team formation, team contracts, and project management.
- Transition: After the first six weeks, lectures become optional drop-in sessions as students are well into their projects by this point.
- Team Collaboration time: Students use this time to work together in their teams.
- Mentor Meetings: Mentors meet with teams during this period on a weekly basis.
- Host Organisation Interaction: This can vary, however at Liverpool Business School it is set as a minimum of four touch points with the business client over a typical 12-week module.
- Meetings can be in-person or virtual, based on the host's availability.

In summary, the module's flexible structure, mentorship, and adaptability facilitates collaboration between students, mentors, and businesses, even in a virtual environment.

At the midpoint of the project, students face a crucial moment for reflection and assessment. To evaluate their progress, consider the following key areas:

Project management evaluation:

- Schedule: Assess if the project is on track according to the timeline.
- Milestones: Check if the essential milestones have been achieved.
- Quality: Evaluate the quality of the work produced.
- Stakeholder Expectations: Determine whether the project meets the expectations of stakeholders.
- Team Dynamics: Examine how effectively the team is collaborating.

Presentation and posters ideas

- Use of posters: Instead of traditional presentations, students create posters highlighting the project, the work undertaken and the final recommendations and output. Using a poster mid-way through the project offers a snapshot of the student's progress and can be used to offer formative feedback to the student on their project and progress
- Boardroom-style meetings: Conducting 3-4 official boardroom-style meetings with students, where they present their progress. This approach supports ongoing engagement with the project and provides a structured assessment opportunity
- Presentation as a vlog: students' reflection on their skills developed over the course of the project.
- Presentation as a vlog, students' present themselves and their skills aligning to a job description.

2. Design an appropriate framework to anchor reflection

The following suggested structured approach can provide students with a framework to anchor their reflections and make the process more meaningful and relevant to their learning.

Student reflection: After group work, provide opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences. Discuss what worked well and areas for improvement. What will they do differently to overcome any issues?	Mentor feedback: Offer constructive feedback to enhance future group interactions. Encourage self-assessment and peer evaluation.
Student reflection: Each week students to directly link their reflection to the course content and particular areas they wish to focus on.	Mentor feedback: Each week the mentors should be guiding the students to apply the theory learnt in lectures to the consultancy project.

The challenge lies in finding a balance between providing students with enough structure to guide their reflections whilst allowing them the flexibility to explore their experiences and develop their reflective capabilities. Also to understand what they are learning through the process and not just at the end.



Business Clinic Value

This section of the report aims to outline the potential value of the Business Clinic activity for various stakeholders involved. Stakeholders identified by participants in the symposium encompass:

- **Students**
- **University**
- **Business Clients**

Each stakeholder stands to gain different forms of value from their involvement in the Business Clinic. Yet, as highlighted in the symposium discussions, this aspect emerges as a key area of research within the Business Clinic framework.

Current practices, policies and resources

1. Students need to transition their identity from student to professional practitioner, within the Business Clinic framework. Rather than viewing themselves solely as learners, students should be encouraged to adopt the role of junior consultants, fully immersing themselves in the responsibilities and challenges of the role. Through interactions with CEOs and business owners, especially in SMEs, students gain insight into entrepreneurship, envisioning themselves as future business leaders.
2. This shift in perspective holds significant value for students in terms of their employability. By aligning themselves with the Business Clinic, students not only enhance their skills but also bolster their professional profiles. Engaging with real-world projects yields tangible benefits such as testimonials, increased visibility, substantial contributions, and updated resumes.
3. Measuring the impact of the Business Clinic, particularly in terms of soft skills development, is a valuable initiative. Implementing pre-and post-assessments to gauge students' skill levels and competencies at the beginning and end of the module can provide valuable insight into their growth and progress. This data can be used to refine and improve the module over time and demonstrate its effectiveness to stakeholders, such as the University, when funding is being requested.
4. The use of pre and post-measurements with students can be valuable to the academic to evaluate any shift in skills or knowledge. One such method is the EntreComp framework (Bacigalupo, 2016) which can be used to create a pre- and post-intervention tool, which prompts the student to reflect on changes in their confidence levels and knowledge across various competencies from the beginning to the end of the programme.

“..... when students enter the job market, they are perceived not merely as students but as emerging executives, their credibility reinforced by concrete evidence of their practical experiences.”

“This type of evaluation set alongside a piece of reflection helps the students appreciate their learning and development.”

Recommendations: improvement and new areas of practice

1. Set out a framework for value

Ensure you are clear from the onset what value you expect from the clinic, and from relationships between students, university, business and business sectors, international, national, regional and local.

Examples:

- Employability of the student
- To secure repeat business from employers to ensure their satisfaction.
- Focusing on supporting social enterprise and charities in the local region, promoting the university as civically engaged institution and its reputation.
- Contribute to REF Impact Case Studies.

The value of the Business Clinic to the student, needs to be captured over the longer term to identify measures which effectively demonstrate the learning value of the programme.

For value to be clear, there are several theoretical and practical skills frameworks which could be used, in particular Green Comp (Bianchi et al, 2022), EntreComp (Bacigalupo, 2016), or even considering value through different lenses, such as sustainability and the SDGs or even the social return on investment [SROI]. **The framework should be decided before any data is collected.**

2. Use an online platform to connect students across the globe

Using online platforms, the experience for the student can indeed be global as well as local. By collaborating with international students and addressing clients from other countries you introduce a dynamic and diverse perspective. This approach enriches students' learning experiences and encourages collaboration on a broader scale. Support from staff working in the international partner area will need to be engaged, and most universities reported already links to support this type of development.

Managing online projects is likely to require more effort to set up, considering student groups, time zones, and ensuring staff availability to facilitate the sessions until students form their own bonds and can manage the projects online themselves.

3. Universities need to commit and provided support

From an institutional or school perspective, there is a vulnerability when being involved in a business clinic approach. It can be seen as a high-risk activity, juggling clients, mentors, students and other academics. To get it right, the university must commit to supporting the activity with the right staff and finances.

4. Manage the risk

Consider the risk with this type of activity relative to project outcomes, leadership roles, and client relationships. For a business clinic to prosper, risk needs to be monitored and controlled. For example, a client could support a group and give up several hours, and in return be presented with a poor project output. You can mitigate this risk by using business mentors, however this is still not always guaranteed. Therefore, it is important to define and measure risks from the outset.



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About Liverpool Business School

Liverpool Business School [LBS] distinguishes itself in the educational sector through a distinctive approach which is integrally linked to its core values, mission, and educational offerings. This approach positions Liverpool Business School at the forefront of business education. Here are the key factors which set Liverpool Business School apart:

- 1. Local Roots, Global Impact:** As Liverpool's Business School, LBS is not just an educational institution but a cornerstone of the Liverpool City Region. With strong ties to the local community, businesses, and academia, LBS catalyses regional growth while also making a significant impact on a global scale. Its qualifications, students, and academics are globally recognised and valued, reflecting its deep-rooted regional reputation and its aspiration to contribute to the broader global community.
- 2. Engaged and Well-Connected:** LBS prides itself on being an engaged business school, deeply connected to the needs and aspirations of the region's businesses. Through strong relationships and close collaboration with industry partners, LBS ensures that its educational programmes remain relevant and responsive to the ever-changing demands of the business world. Its proximity to business allows LBS to provide leadership through innovative ideas which challenge conventional thinking, fostering a culture of continuous learning and adaptation.
- 3. Responsible Leadership and Management Education:** At the heart of LBS's mission is the commitment to responsible management and leadership education. Balancing economic growth with social and environmental imperatives, LBS prepares the next generation of leaders and managers to shape businesses for the betterment of society. This ethos of responsible leadership permeates through all aspects of LBS's educational offerings, ensuring that graduates are not only proficient in business acumen but also ethical and socially conscious leaders.
- 4. Experiential Learning:** LBS's signature pedagogy revolves around experiential learning, where theory meets practice in real-world business settings. Through innovative programmes such as the BA Applied Entrepreneurship and embedded experience such as the Liverpool Business Clinic and Accounting and Finance Clinic, students have the opportunity to make early contributions to organisations whilst studying and gaining invaluable hands-on experience which prepares them for the challenges of the business world.
- 5. Driven by Engaged Scholarship and Research:** LBS is driven by engaged scholarship and research which seeks to shape a better future. Through high-impact academic excellence and knowledge exchange initiatives, LBS collaborates closely with industry partners to address real-world challenges and opportunities. This symbiotic relationship between research, teaching, and business practice ensures that LBS remains at the forefront of innovation and thought leadership in the business domain.
- 6. Relational and Mission-Driven:** Believing in the power of relationships and a strong sense of belonging, LBS fosters a community of learning where businesses, students, and staff come together to shape the future collaboratively. Its mission-driven approach goes beyond financial metrics, focusing on high impact and social value as key measures of success. By promoting businesses as a force for good, LBS supports and enables the growth aspirations of small businesses, fosters purpose-driven community organisations, and reinforces the role of leaders in local government and health sectors.

In essence, Liverpool Business School stands out as a beacon of responsible leadership, innovation, and community engagement, shaping a better future for businesses, society, and the global community.

About NCEE

Created in 2004, NCEE is supported by universities for universities. Our mission is to support universities to be more enterprising and entrepreneurial.

NCEE is an international organisation that focuses on promoting and developing entrepreneurial universities. We are a platform and collaborative network for sharing best practices, research and insights related to enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation.

NCEE provides a range of services to universities and their senior leadership and practitioners.

Services include:

Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities

Global Alliance of Entrepreneurial Universities

NCEE facilitate and support a network of inspirational and innovative universities. Working in partnership NCEE seeks to equip university staff, students and graduates for an ever-changing world. The Alliance supports universities to be at the vanguard of new entrepreneurial thinking and initiatives, raise their visibility and profile and further support enterprising students and staff. With members across the world, the Alliance offers an excellent way to forge new relationships and collaborations. Masterclasses, seminars, study visits, symposium and research collaborations are all part of the Alliance.

Entrepreneurial Leadership

Entrepreneurial Leadership Training

NCEE's entrepreneurial leadership education and training provides cutting-edge concepts and strategies for university staff. The programmes develop skills in entrepreneurship - resilience, change management skills and the ability to adapt. The programmes help build a network of peers to share opportunities and discuss challenges and approaches. The 500 alumni from the programmes are supported within the community, with many now in top positions.

Entrepreneurial University Award

Entrepreneurial University Award

NCEE accredit and award universities. The Entrepreneurial University Award recognises entrepreneurial universities and colleges. Drawing on two decades of collaborative experience with universities, sector bodies and governments, the Award service provides a complete package for assessing, building and rewarding entrepreneurial capacity within colleges or universities.