

# From Theory to Local Business Impact

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Universities are increasingly being recognised not only as centres of teaching and research, but also as active contributors to regional economic growth and business innovation. Through initiatives such as business clinics, business schools across the UK are building stronger relationships with SMEs, entrepreneurs, and local organisations to create meaningful impact for both students and the wider business ecosystem.

At Liverpool Business School, one of the highlights of our Small Business Charter journey has been the continued development of our student-led Business Clinic. The Clinic provides students with the opportunity to turn theory into practice by working on real, live consultancy projects with businesses and organisations across the region. There is something incredibly rewarding about connecting students directly to the business ecosystem. These partnerships create learning opportunities on both sides. Students gain invaluable practical experience, confidence, and professional skills, while businesses benefit from fresh perspectives, innovative thinking, and evidence-based recommendations. Working in groups, students undertake live consultancy projects for local businesses, delivering research, recommendations, and fresh ideas that help organisations address real-world challenges.

## Impact

The scale of this work continues to grow. Last year alone, more than 700 students at LJMU delivered over 85,000 hours of consultancy support across more than 100 organisations. This demonstrates not only the appetite among students to engage with industry, but also the significant role universities can play in supporting local business communities.

This impact is further reinforced through a Social Return on Investment (SROI) exercise, which identified clear positive outcomes arising from Business Clinic activity. Together, this evidence highlights both the depth and value of the contribution being made and provides a strong

platform for continued development. We are building on these insights and using feedback from businesses and mentors to further enhance the support delivered.

## Examples of Impact

“Working with the Business Clinic has been a valuable experience for the Centre. The student teams turned academic theory into a commercially focused retail strategy, showing strong insight into customer behaviour, footfall, and city-centre competition. Their recommendations were grounded in real data and research, making them both evidence-based and actionable. What stood out most was their ability to create a campaign that was not only creative but realistic, implementable, and aligned with our commercial objectives. Their solutions were impactful and have helped shape our approach to customer engagement and centre performance moving forward.”

### **Neil Ashcroft, St John’s Shopping Centre**

“They created what will be the template for future trials of our products, which is of immense value to us.”

### **A Sefton-based business and world leader in micro freight vehicles**

“The projects have changed the way we think about ticket sales, membership sales, and matchday entertainment. As the season has not started yet, we have not been able to implement all of these ideas, but they are definitely part of our planning discussions. There were also several content ideas that we passed on to the media team to improve our social media output. The students were very positive and forward-thinking, and we could tell they were passionate about their studies and the project we had set them. The results we received were very strong and will help us with future decision-making.”

### **Tom Hoyle, Marketing Manager, Hull KR**

## Mentors

A key element of the Business Clinic model at LJMU is ensuring that businesses receive genuine value and meaningful support throughout the process. Each consultancy project is supported by dedicated business mentors who work alongside students and academic staff. Their involvement adds an important layer of commercial insight, helping students test ideas against real-world business challenges and expectations.

Mentors also provide constructive challenge and professional guidance, strengthening the credibility, relevance, and practical value of project outcomes. In doing so, they help bridge the gap between academic learning and professional practice while also developing students' confidence, employability, and understanding of consultancy in action.

*'What I love most about the Business Clinic is how so many SMEs, charities, and social enterprises benefit from this service. These are organisations that often struggle to find the resources, time, funding, or expertise to invest in research or strategic business development. Having a fresh perspective on your business from a student team, gaining insights, data, trends, and recommendations that may shape your next move or inform positive change, is priceless.'* **Caroline Gavin, Positive4Growth**

## Professional Services Support

LBS has made a clear commitment to building and sustaining these relationships. Strong partnerships with businesses do not happen by accident; they require ongoing collaboration, trust, and dedicated support structures. One of the most important lessons we have learned is that successful initiatives such as the Business Clinic rely on effective collaboration between academic staff and professional services teams. Without the support of our professional services colleagues, the Clinic simply could not function effectively. Their role is central to maintaining external relationships, matching students with appropriate consultancy projects, coordinating communications, and acting as the key point of contact for both business mentors and students throughout the process.

## Why This Matters

As universities continue to evolve their civic and economic roles, initiatives such as student-led business clinics demonstrate the real value that higher education institutions can bring to local and regional economies. They show that when academic learning is connected directly to live organisational challenges, universities can support SME growth, enhance graduate employability, and contribute to stronger, more resilient business ecosystems. At a time when civic impact and work-ready graduates matter more than ever, this model offers a practical and credible approach that other institutions can adapt to their own contexts.

## Sharing Practice

Several universities are now seeking to embed similar initiatives, either as part of the formal curriculum for academic credit or through extracurricular opportunities. The key to success is finding academic leaders who are willing to embrace a degree of uncertainty and take informed risks in delivering experiential learning. Real-world consultancy projects are dynamic

and unpredictable by nature, but it is often within that uncertainty that the richest learning takes place. Sharing models of practice across the sector can help institutions design more sustainable approaches that benefit students, strengthen employability, and deepen relationships with local business communities.

This blog was initially published on the Small Business Charter website  
<https://smallbusinesscharter.org/sbc-accredited-business-schools/knowledge-sharing/from-theory-to-local-business-impact>