Career Lab: Student Consultancy Programme 2023/24

"[The student consultants] did a great job, really understood what we were looking for and, in their presentation, gave us useful, practical recommendations. For any other employers who have a business question that could be a project, I would highly recommend getting involved in the Student Consultancy Programme." Jenny Holmes, Recruitment Manager, Brighton and Hove City Council

Important information for organisations

Introduction

Career Lab is a series of opportunities designed to develop students' skills, experience, connections and confidence throughout their time at Sussex. The programme is primarily for all undergraduate students, with places prioritised for students from [underrepresented groups](#).

One of our high impact Career Lab programmes is Student Consultancy which offers our valued partners the opportunity to tackle a live challenge faced by your organisation whilst providing meaningful work experience. Student places are prioritised for final year undergraduates but taught postgraduate students are also eligible to take part.

You will be allocated a team of 5 students from a mix of degree backgrounds, who will spend a collective 100 hours on your challenge, and present their research to you. There is no financial obligation (the University provides a stipend directly to the students), the research will be carried out remotely, and the time commitment is low.

Students will have varying levels of work experience but will have strong research skills and a willingness to learn. They will receive training and support from the University throughout. There are limited project spaces and priority will be given to consultancy briefs that contribute towards the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#).

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"What a fantastic programme and opportunity. We've loved being part of it and are really pleased with the outcomes." Chris Duncan-Scott, Learning Lead, Acceler8 Global

1. What can our students do for your organisation?

Organisations that become Student Consultancy Programme clients will benefit from a team of 5 students who will research, analyse and recommend solutions to a challenge, based on a project brief provided by you. Topics may include:

- **Environmental sustainability improvements**
  Analyse current practices in your organisation and suggest areas where you can become more environmentally conscious and sustainable
- **Market/competitor analysis**
  Identify your key competitors' strengths
  Understand your target audience and what they are looking for
- **Customer engagement**
  Research innovative ways to engage your audience
- **Business development**
  Explore how viable a new business idea is
- **Evaluation**
  Critically review your evaluation practices
- **Coronavirus response and strategies**
  Investigate what/how customer trends have changed in relation to your industry in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.
  Discover opportunities to diversify your organisation to become more resilient to global change

2. What will your organisation receive?

All clients will receive a professional-style presentation, delivered by the student team, at the end of the programme which highlights their key findings. The contents of the presentation depend on the scope of the project, but will typically include a synthesis of their research and informed recommendations.

You will benefit from a dedicated student team from mixed degree backgrounds, who will take a multidisciplinary approach to the project. The team will also nominate a team lead to be your key contact.

The final deliverable is a presentation and supplementary materials/an appendix. Due to time restraints and the learning focus on presentation skills and teamwork, students will not be required to write a report.

The Career Lab team remains available during the programme for queries and ongoing assistance.

"We were very impressed with the students' work and presentation. They have provided a really valuable research project for our business." Kerry Watkins, Managing Director, Social for Good

3. When and how long does a project take?

The Student Consultancy Programme runs twice during the academic year:

- Winter 2023: 13 November to 8 December 2023
- Spring 2024: 19 February to 15 March 2024

Students work part-time, approximately 5 hours per student per week, over 4 weeks.

The student team will contribute a collective 100 hours on the project brief. If your project requires more/less time than this, we will discuss alternative opportunities for collaboration with you.

Please see below an exemplar timeline for Spring 2024:

Date	Task
30 October 2023	Project brief applications open to organisations.
19 January 2024	Project brief applications close for the Spring programme.
January/February 2024	Pre-programme preparation: project briefs finalised, teams allocated, meet and greet scheduled and introductions sent. The Career Lab team will guide consultancy clients throughout.
w/c 12 February 2024	Week 1 of project work Student teams receive pre-project training from the Career Lab team. Meet and greet takes place between students and their consultancy client.
19 February – 1 March 2024	Week 2/3 of project work Students and their consultancy client have a midway meetup for questions and updates. Students receive training from the Career Lab team on presenting their project findings.
w/c 4 March 2024	Week 4 of project work Students deliver final presentation to their consultancy client. Students receive training from the Career Lab team on how to present their work experience on CVs and during interviews.

Please note that during the project, we ask consultancy clients to be available to speak with their student team, and meet on a minimum of three occasions:

1) Meet and greet and project briefing on day 1 (to be organised with the Career Lab team)

2) Midway meetup in week 2/3 (to be organised by the student team)
3) Final project presentation in week 4 (to be organised by the student team)

4. What we need from you

- Write a project brief proposal as part of the Expression of Interest form.
- Provide a key contact who is available to discuss your project further with the Career Lab team to confirm its suitability and next steps.
- Engage with and support your allocated student team for the duration of the programme, including answering queries and the provision of all necessary materials to set students up for project execution, e.g., relevant context, data and examples of deliverables.
- Be available for the meet and greet, midway meetup, and final presentation.

Places on the programme are prioritised for students from underrepresented groups, who typically report lower confidence and little work experience. Project consultancy clients will be expected to promote a supportive learning environment where students can thrive and make a valued contribution to the programme. The Career Lab team and University support services will be able to advise where individual support is requested, for example, adjustment requests.

We also ask that project consultancy clients notify the Career Lab team if a student does not engage with the programme.

5. What to consider when proposing a project

When proposing a consultancy project, please be aware that projects should be discrete, contained and meaningfully completed in a collective 100 hours (including research, analysis, presentation):

1) Projects should not require any expert knowledge of your industry/organisation that cannot be feasibly gained within the timeframe of the project (i.e., the brief must not be technical or require specialist knowledge/experience). Your student team will be studying a mix of degrees.
2) Projects should not require access to specialist systems/databases that require additional training.
3) Projects should not require students to conduct a survey with the public or other students. Research should be conducted on existing data and information.
4) Projects where external perspective is valued and important for decision-making should not be included.

Please note: if the topic area requires the student team to sign a non-disclosure agreement, we can support you with this.

For consultancy clients, the programme can be completed remotely, with meetings and the final presentation conducted online. If you wish to, you may like to offer students the

opportunity to visit your workplace, for example for their final presentation. Previously, students have valued the opportunity to visit their organisation in-person and meet the team. Please note that you must have employer's **liability insurance** to offer in person activities and conduct a risk assessment. Alternatively, we welcome project consultancy clients to visit the University campus to meet their student team. You will be asked in the Expression of Interest form whether you would like to offer your project as 'online-only' or with an opportunity to visit your organisation in person.

In 2022/23, 100% of project consultancy clients would recommend the Student Consultancy Programme to other organisations.

6. Example project brief and topics
Please see below two examples of a complete project brief:

Example 1:
What is the challenge that you would like our students to tackle?
How can we create a successful fundraising event to generate new supporters to our charity and raise awareness of our important local cause?

Please list up to four specific questions, or tasks, that you would like the students to work on.
1) How can we attract 50-100 new local supporters to our cause through an initiative or a fundraising event?
2) How would we retain these supporters to engage them with our work?
3) What methods do you recommend that we use to convert these new supporters to support financially on a long-term basis?
4) What methods of engagement should we try with these supporters, via our website, newsletters, face to face – any other ideas?

Example 2:
What is the challenge that you would like our students to tackle?
Waste Management - To investigate UK routes for reuse/recycling of waste streams from the English sparkling winemaking process - especially grape marc, bidules and caps.

Please list up to four specific questions, or tasks, that you would like the students to work on.
1) Investigate possible UK channels available to recycle grape marc (a bi-product of pressing grapes). Currently this goes to composting. See work that has been in Australia for example https://www.wmwaste.com.au/resource-centre/8-things-you-need-to-know-about-getting-rid-of-grape-marc/
2) Investigate possible UK channels for recycling of plastic bidules and metal caps (similar to beer bottle caps).

Other project topics may include:
- We wish to launch a new charity-arm to our business. Provide us with suggestions as to how we can successfully launch this charity-arm to the local community.
- We wish to raise our profile as an equal-opportunities employer. Suggest ways in which we can improve our recruitment of LGBTQ+ staff.

- We are looking to review and improve our online presence, with a particular focus on our website. Critically test the useability and navigability, and suggest ways we can improve traffic to our webpages. What works, what doesn't?
- We are an eco-conscious clothing retailer. How can we reduce our carbon footprint in both production and transportation?
- I would like to create an online magazine for my young students to submit their work to. Suggest three suitable online publishing platforms that I could use to create this magazine for my students. From your research, advise on your preferred platform from your shortlisting.
- Conduct a competitor analysis on our industry in the UK. Based on your research, who are our top competitors? What do they do well? What do they not do so well on?

Please note: we cannot accept project briefs that require the students to conduct a survey with the public or other students.

7. Express your interest in becoming a client

Registration/ log-in is required at: University of Sussex CareerHub

In order to express your interest organisations must complete the following form:

University of Sussex Student Consultancy - Expression of Interest Form

We welcome applications from returning project consultancy clients.

The closing date for expression of interest is **19 January 2024** for the Spring 2024. Early applications are advised as we may close applications sooner.

Please note that submitting an expression of interest is not a confirmation of involvement. Feedback will be provided, and if your project proposal is not a suitable fit for this programme, we will discuss alternative opportunities to collaborate with you.

If you have any questions about the programme, please do not hesitate to contact us: careerlab@sussex.ac.uk

8. The impact of the Student Consultancy Programme 2022/23

"Your presentation style and capability is better than many of the clients we work with who do it for a living – so you should be very pleased with that! The thought that went in to replicating our brand and making it feel part us was also wonderful to see." Project consultancy client feedback for a student team

In 2022/23, 43 organisations took part in the Student Consultancy Programme, providing meaningful work experience for 221 students, 44% of whom are from at least one underrepresented group.

Organisations setting project briefs range in sectors and organisation types, including charities and NGOs, start-ups, business and management, travel and tourism, media, public services, education, marketing and advertising, and retail and sales.

In 2022/23, 100% of project consultancy clients would recommend the Student Consultancy Programme to other organisations.

For students, common highlights of the programme include working in a team, collaborating with and getting to know organisations, and delivering a final presentation to a client.

100% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:
- "I believe taking part in the programme has helped me develop important transferable skills for my career."
- "I intend to use this experience when writing job applications and at interviews"

As a result of outstanding performance, a number of consultancy clients have also successfully recruited students as paid members of staff for their organisation.

Career Lab summer internships
As part of our Career Lab programme, the University of Sussex also offers full funding to employers to recruit a Sussex undergraduate student, full-time for six or eight weeks during the summer of 2024. We seek genuine work experience opportunities, with structured projects and tasks that will offer the intern personal and skills development. Part-time hours over a longer period will also be considered.

Student Consultancy clients are welcome to also apply for a funded intern. You may wish to advertise your internship to all eligible students, or make an offer directly to a student in your team, if they are a final year undergraduate. Organisations following the latter route have shared that this maintains the momentum of the research project and allows a student intern to put their recommendations into practice.

If you are interested in a funded intern, please visit Funded Interns for more information or contact CareerLab@sussex.ac.uk.