



## Students and knowledge exchange in university business services

Dr Daniel Jackson,  
Dr Mike Molesworth  
and Graham Goode

**BU** Bournemouth  
University

<http://media.bournemouth.ac.uk>

For a printed copy of this report, please contact:

Dr. Daniel Jackson

T: 01202 961297

E: [jacksond@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:jacksond@bournemouth.ac.uk)

June 2014

ISBN 978-1-910446-00-3

© Copyright CMC Publishing, Bournemouth University

The authors would like to thank Prof Matthew Bennett of Bournemouth University for supporting this project, the students who helped collect data: Laura Bradley, Jasmin Dent, Sarah Loughlin, Emily Thorpe, Camilla Sanders; and colleagues who worked on the case studies: Dr Ana Adi and Dr Shelley Thompson.

# Executive summary

There are many external exigencies and strong arguments in favour of universities investing more in enterprise and business engagement. This report is driven by these, but with a particular focus on the role of students and consultancy projects. We present:

- An overview of how involved students are engaging in knowledge exchange through consultancy via a comprehensive audit of all 164 UK HEI's.
- Through four case studies (with a total of 32 interviews and 3 focus groups), the key tensions, barriers and motivations (both internal and external) in integrating students in consultancy in ways that benefit them, academic staff, HEIs and external organisations.
- The implications for the management of such projects.

We find that **almost every (96%, N=111) HEI that offers business services in the field of marketing, media and creative industries involves students in some way**, with placements, internships and KTPs typically and routinely offered to businesses.

Our focus then becomes Student Enterprise Units (SEU), where **46 UK HEIs have business consultancy services that utilize students**. We find that:

- In the main, **SEU's are reasonably small, have a modest number of staff dedicated to them, and are not currently a significant source of income for UK HEIs**. However, there is an acceptance that this type of enterprise activity is not about profit for the HEI, but its value lies in enhancing the student experience.
- What does seem consistent though is **the need for dedicated staff to develop business contacts and to work with tutors and students**.
- Projects vary in scope, but **it seems clear that larger SEUs (and therefore those that have the most impact on HEIs, their students, and external organisations) are likely to be centrally run rather than located in schools**.
- **Over 60% of Student Enterprise Units pay students in some way**, though in most cases there was no guarantee of student payment, no set prices offered to clients, and so arrangements were generally much more ad hoc than our figure suggests.

**We find different models of Student Enterprise Unit exist with respect to their links to research and education.**

Our audit and case studies suggest that **by far the most significant role for Student Enterprise Units is to support teaching by providing live briefs and assessed projects to students**. This speaks to a model of student enterprise activity that is closely tied to the curriculum, typically a dissertation or final year project that is completed as a piece of consultancy. Where the activity is limited to student assessment, academic may staff have very little input to the project itself and may not have any contact with business clients.

**Another model of student enterprise involves greater collaboration between staff and students, which often takes it away from assessed work**. These SEU's are more likely to be positioned and branded as a stand-alone agency, and may undertake business-critical work for clients who will pay based on a set fees structure. However, this model is a minority venture: only eight (14.5%) SEU's were based around staff research and seven (12.7%) of 55 SEU's involve collaboration between staff and students.

In our case studies we specifically asked participants about their understanding of the benefits and tensions of student enterprise work. **Benefits** include:

- For students, **enterprise seems to primarily add value to degree programmes by providing experiences that build student CVs and give them access to business networks and potential employers**.
- **When working collaboratively with staff there are even more benefits:** students report that rather than feeling that research and consultancy are remote, taking tutors away from time with students, they see the activities as important and integrated. For staff, engaging in collaborative enterprise projects linked to their research provides more opportunities for 'impact'.
- **There is also good evidence from all the case studies that businesses, both regional and national, benefit greatly from student enterprise work and their feedback is overwhelmingly positive.**

Tensions include:

- **Where activity is aligned with assessment, there are significant timing issues and some there are limitations on the projects that students can take on.**

- **The wider point here is that enterprise that is focussed on student needs, is potentially less useful for businesses.**

- **There are issues of cost.** Many small business have limited resources. The result is that there is demand for 'free' advice in the form of student projects and this is an attraction for businesses of this form of knowledge exchange.

- Managing the internal and external profile of SEUs can be a challenge. Our audit data reveals just how hard it is for external organisations to find SEUs, not least because even when calls are made, reception or business services staff don't know of their existence. Here central support services such as marketing and communications need to be aware of and support SEUs.

The key recommendations for those involved in student enterprise projects include:

1. Ensure adequate resources
- 2. Senior management buy-in is therefore a key ingredient of successful SEUs.**
- 3. To encourage staff buy-in to a project, communicate SEU's internally, including their core aims.**
4. Where the emphasis is on assessment, students are generally not paid for their work, however **where students undertake optional consultancy, they should be paid above minimum wage.**
- 5. Consider the restrictions of the academic calendar,** though these can be overcome where the student enterprise is optional, paid and in collaboration with academic staff.
- 6. Student Enterprise Units can be used for internal work.**
7. Student enterprise work provides meaningful educational experiences and this **may be presented by HEI as 'added value' for courses.**
- 8. Like any business services, SEUs need to be easily found by external organisations.**
- 9. There should be better accounting of student enterprise units.**
- 10. HEIs should consider ways of integrating staff and student consultancy,** as there are many benefits to such activities.
- 11. HEI's should make sure that staff engagement in enterprise activities are sufficiently recognised and rewarded.**

# Contents page

1. <b>Introduction</b>	page	7
2. <b>Focus of this report</b>	page	9
3. <b>Methodology</b>	page	10
4. <b>Audit findings</b>	page	11
4.1 Student Enterprise Units	page	12
4.2 The size, shape and age of Student Enterprise Units	page	12
4.3 Incentives for student enterprise	page	13
4.4 Links between enterprise, education and research: models of SEU	page	13
4.5 The challenges of finding information about university business services	page	15
5. <b>Case studies</b>	page	17
5.1 Management and organisation of student enterprise	page	17
5.2 Financial arrangements	page	18
5.3 Integration with teaching and research	page	19
5.4 Benefits of enterprise activity	page	20
5.5 Tensions in enterprise activities	page	21
6. <b>Conclusions and Recommendations for HEIs</b>	page	22
<b>Appendix A. Overview of Student Enterprise Units</b>	page	25

# Glossary of terms

CEB – Creative Enterprise Bureau (Bournemouth University)

HEI – Higher Education Institution

KTP – Knowledge Transfer Partnership

KE – Knowledge Exchange

PG – Postgraduate

SEU – Student Enterprise Unit

SMP – Student Media Project (University of Gloucestershire)

UG – Undergraduate

VM – Venture Matrix (Sheffield Hallam University)

WBS Projects – Warwick Business School, University of Warwick



# Introduction

Enterprise is becoming a more important part of UK Higher Education Institution (HEI) activity as a source of revenue, added value to students, and broader demonstration of the contribution of HEIs to the economy. For example, the recently published independent Witty Review (2013)<sup>1</sup> - commissioned by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills - lays down a challenge to universities. It recommends that universities should see enhancing economic growth as their 'third mission' alongside teaching and research, and that the Government should invest £1billion over the next Parliament in a fund for 'Arrow Projects' – for which universities would bid to become 'arrowheads' leading regional innovation projects.

University business services and enterprise activity will therefore be under greater scrutiny than before. Enterprise activity by HEIs may encompass a range of formal and informal activity from Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) to academic consultancy, student live briefs and placements. Despite this there is little information on the overall provision of business services by HEIs in the UK and even less on that which involves students engaging with consultancy (see Rae et al [2012]<sup>2</sup> for a recent exception). In this report, our focus is on the latter: the role of *students* in university business consultancy.

<sup>1</sup>Witty, A. (2013). *Encouraging a British Invention Revolution: Sir Andrew Witty's Review of Universities and Growth*. UK Government. Available from: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/249720/bis-13-1241-encouraging-a-british-invention-revolution-andrew-witty-review-R1.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/249720/bis-13-1241-encouraging-a-british-invention-revolution-andrew-witty-review-R1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Rae, D., Martin, L., Antcliff, V. and Hannon, P. (2012). Enterprise and entrepreneurship in English higher education: 2010 and beyond. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 19 (3). pp. 380-401.

In this report we:

- Provide an overview of how involved students are engaging in HEI knowledge exchange through consultancy
- Discuss the different models of student consultancy that exist
- Assess the key tensions, barriers and motivations (both internal and external) in integrating students in consultancy in ways that benefit them, academic staff, HEIs and external organisations
- Consider the implications for the management of such projects

We are investigating an area of HE provision that is highly salient and of growing importance to the sector: business services that involve students. The rise in such services is firstly underpinned by *political and economic exigencies*, such as successive government agendas seeking to better align the HE sector with business community requirements (and to measure this through such mechanisms as 'impact factors'), and the increasing marketisation of HE, which brings pressures to:

- Establish revenue streams in addition to teaching and scholarly research
- Demonstrate enhanced 'employability' of graduates
- Differentiate course offerings through 'added value' for students

There are also *pedagogic exigencies* as demonstrated in the shift of emphasis in the way in which people are thinking about the HE experience and the role of employability within it (see Pegg et al., 2012<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>3</sup>Pegg, A., Waldoock, J., Hendy-Isaac, S. and Lawton, R. (2012). *Pedagogy for Employability*. Higher Education Authority. Available from: [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/pedagogy\\_for\\_employability\\_update\\_2012.pdf](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/employability/pedagogy_for_employability_update_2012.pdf)

For example:

- The development of explicit connection between study and the workplace
- The issue of student autonomy and the shared contribution to the student experience of higher education
- the current lack of evaluation of initiatives and approaches to teaching and learning employability skills

The emergence of business consultancy utilising students raises a number of important issues around the extent and types of student business consultancy operating in UK HEIs, including the roles of students, academics and careers/ employability professionals, and the role of the consultancy within the HEI's other consultancy services and institutional strategy. There are also issues of client experiences and expectations of student consultancy projects, especially in the context of recent controversies over unpaid internships and 'free labour'. Finally, there are the pedagogical issues, such as what motivates students to engage with consultancy and what; what barriers exist that inhibit student engagement with consultancy; and the extent to which student consultancy is integrated into the curriculum (including assessment) or any other credit structures, and how this affects the way students engage in and reflect upon their broader university learning.





# Focus of this report

Clearly there are many ways that HEIs engage in knowledge transfer activities and no one report can cover all disciplines or all types of university business services. **Our focus is marketing, media and the creative industries**, including: Art and design; Marketing strategy; Marketing research; Marketing communications; PR; Digital communications strategy; Advertising and Media production (including TV, radio, interactive).

**Furthermore, our focus is only on services to business that include students**, either undergraduate (UG) or postgraduate (PG), and excluding graduate services and PhD students. This might be in a collaborative or supervised role alongside academics, as well as student-led initiatives such as a communications agency set up by students, but it would exclude ventures such as student newspapers because we are just looking at *services to business* where there is a focus on knowledge exchange.

Whilst we briefly document what internship, placement and other student services HEIs offer, **our main attention is on Student Enterprise Units (SEUs)**. These are loosely defined as services to business offered by universities that involve current, campus-based students in some formal way. They are about *working with businesses* to solve their problems or to add value as an external consultant rather than sending students out to business for work experience (like with formal placements), although there is some overlap. As we will see, they vary with regard to whether they are branded or not, whether they charge clients, their relationship with assessment, whether they are centrally or locally managed, and whether they are a collaboration between staff and students.



# Methodology

The findings in this report are based on two methodologies: an audit of business services involving students at all 164 UK HEI's and more detailed case studies of four universities utilising interviews and focus groups.

## *The audit*

In order to understand how much and what types of business services are offered involving students, an audit of all 164 HEIs<sup>4</sup> in the UK was conducted between November 2012 and February 2013. Our researchers analysed the information available on the business services pages of university websites. Sometimes this would take them through to school or faculty webpages, but we did not conduct a general search across all university websites because of the complexity this would involve (most HEI websites run to several thousand or more pages): our point of reference was to find *planned and publicised* business services that *can easily be found by businesses*. Where necessary, the website search was followed up by (often multiple) phone calls to the university.

On occasion it was not always possible to get the required information from each university due to lack of cooperation or knowledge<sup>5</sup>. When this was the case we removed them from the sample. We found a lack of knowledge about student enterprise a particular theme in section 4.2, when we asked about the numbers of staff and students involved in student enterprise units (SEU), and financial information. Whilst we acknowledge that gaps in knowledge of SEU's are a limitation to sections of our audit, we argue that the lack of internal awareness, central co-ordination and accounting of SEU's is a potentially important finding in itself, and should provide a point of reflection for UK HEI's. A key observation here is that if we can't find a consultancy unit, then an external organization is unlikely to either.

## *The case studies*

The four case studies were chosen on the basis of the information we gained from the audit. The four case studies are outward-facing SEUs, which represent different models of student enterprise found in the audit. We conducted interviews and focus groups with students, academic staff, professional staff and clients of the consultancy service. There were a total of 32 interviews and 3 focus groups.

<sup>4</sup> The University of London is a confederal organisation made up of a number of constituent colleges and institutes that were counted separately. In April 2013 The University of South Wales was created by the merger of the University of Glamorgan and the University of Wales, Newport. At the time of data collection they were still separated and so counted as two entities.

<sup>5</sup> If our researchers made 5 calls and left messages that had not been answered by the university then we made no further calls.



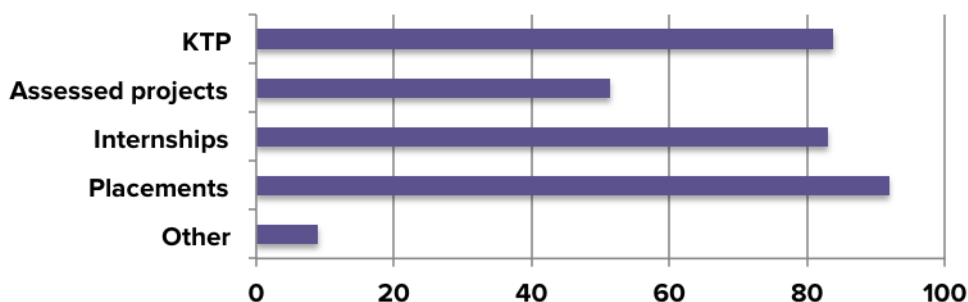
# Audit findings

The first part of the audit sought to establish the basic forms of business services offered by UK HEI's and narrow our focus down towards those business services involving students in marketing, communication and creative industries.

**Of all 164 UK HEI's, the vast majority (88%, N=144) have easily identifiable business services of some sort.** Those that do not are made up of specialist colleges (e.g. art, agriculture or music) or are education-focused colleges. Of these 144 HEI's, 28 (19%) do not offer business services in the field of marketing, communication and the creative industries, and were therefore filtered out from further analysis.

**Almost every (96%, N=111) HEI that offers business services in our field involve students in some way.** Figure 1 shows that there is a large degree of commonality across the sector, with placements, internships and KTPs typically and routinely offered to businesses. Assessed projects are less common with just over half of our sub-sample of HEI's offering them as a service to business (though we would anticipate that more universities run informal 'live briefs' with businesses based on individual contacts that tutors have with external organisations). Other student business services (9%) included apprenticeships, business mentoring schemes and networking opportunities.

Figure 1: Types of services to business involving students (%) (N = 111)<sup>6</sup>



<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that whilst the vast majority of HEI's offered a form of graduate recruitment service, we did not count these as our focus was on current students.

## 4.1 Student Enterprise Units

Moving beyond standard business services involving students, we ask how many UK universities have specific Student Enterprise Units (SEU), either branded or unbranded, in the field of marketing, communication and creative industries?

**46 UK HEIs have business consultancy services that utilize students, what we call SEUs.** Nine of these have two SEUs, making a total of 55<sup>7</sup>, which are listed in Appendix A. Approximately half of Russell Group Universities (13) are represented in this list, with the rest coming from new universities. It is notable that some SEUs are offered by a number of universities, such as GoWales, an employability programme for students and graduates in Wales.

**SEU's are evenly split between those that are attached to a specific department, faculty or school (N=29), and those that run centrally (N=27).** Table 1 shows the majority of those that lie within a department, school or faculty are within business or management disciplines, with fewer sat within media or arts and humanities departments. 73% (N=40) of SEU's are linked to their university careers service in some way. The implication is that the scope, management and focus of such activity varies by institution.

Table 1: What department/ faculty/ school SEUs are found in

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Business/ management	19	65.5
Media/ communication	5	17.2
Arts/ humanities	3	10.3
Other	2	6.9
Total	29	100.0

**SEU's typically involve both undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate (PG) students (68.5%),** with a minority only offered to UG (14.8%) or PG (16.7%) students.

<sup>7</sup>We did find four more Student Enterprise Units, but were unable to get sufficient information from them to include in the dataset.

## 4.2 The size, shape and age of Student Enterprise Units

We start this section with a caveat, which we feel is also a potential concern for many HEIs: **many of the universities we contacted did not have accurate information on the activities of their SEUs.** Very few SEU's kept records of the number of staff or students involved in enterprise activity, and accurate turnover details were scarce. Whilst universities are increasingly centralising student and research administration and information (for example to satisfy the demands of external monitors such as HEFCE and the REF), the same cannot be said for enterprise or consultancy services, at least not that which includes students<sup>8</sup>. The following section should therefore be read with some caution, as sample sizes are quite small and some of the information is based on a degree of estimation by those we spoke to during the audit.

**Generally speaking, SEU's are a recent development for most universities;** and an emerging model of business services. Of the 32 SEU's that could answer the question of how old they are, the mean age is nine years and 78% are 10 years or younger. The longest running Student Enterprise Unit we found was based at Cranfield University, which has been running for 50 years – almost as long as the university itself.

**On average 6.7 staff (academic or support) are involved in the running of a Student Enterprise Unit<sup>9</sup>.** This number includes those who supervise consultancy projects regularly, as well as those who would be considered the 'core' team of organisers. Whilst most SEU's are relatively young enterprises, it also seems that most are relatively small and localised. As we document in our case studies, establishing academic staff 'buy-in' to student enterprise services can be difficult, especially if enterprise is not recognised or rewarded by HEIs.

<sup>8</sup>We do not make this claim with respect to all business services; as staff consultancy and enterprise may be well documented.

<sup>9</sup>This was based on data obtained from 17 of 54 universities. In the cases where the information was missing, the person(s) we spoke to was unable to give us staff numbers.

			Approx how many students are able to take part in the SEU	Approx how many students actually took part in the SEU in the last academic year, 2011-12
<b>Centrally run SEUs</b>		N	7	7
		Mean	7218.86	484.14
		Median	5000	20
		Std. Deviation	7398.961	761.828
		Sum	50532	3389
<b>SEU's attached to a specific department/ faculty/ school</b>		N	10	13*
		Mean	200.5	81.77
		Median	80	50
		Std. Deviation	303.2	94.972
		Sum	2005	1063

Table 2: The number of students participating in SEU enterprise activity, academic year 2011-12.

\* Note: the reason this number is greater than 10 is because 3 universities did not know how many students their SEU was available to, but did know how many took part in the last academic year.

**Student participation levels in SEUs are somewhat dependent on whether the SEU is centrally or locally managed**, though only 17 of the 55 SEU's identified were able to provide this information. Unsurprisingly, centrally run SEU's are open to more students than locally managed ones, and result in more students participating in them (see Table 2). However, it seems that the locally managed SEU's have a higher *proportion* of student take-up for those it is available to: 1 in 2.4 students who the SEU is available to participate in locally managed units, compared to 1 in 15 for centralised ones.

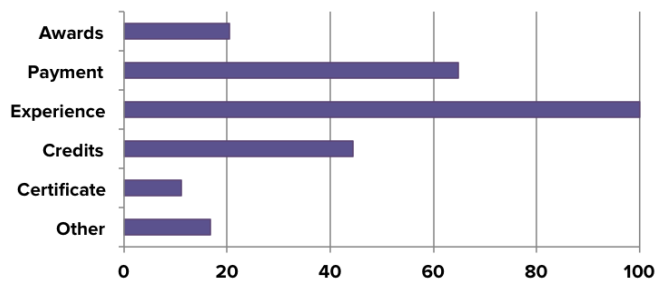
**Finding out how much SEU's turned over in the previous academic year (2011-12) was also difficult**, and this was not just because some HEI's did not want to divulge this information. In fact in over half the cases (see Table 3), the person(s) we spoke to simply did not know turnover figures. Of the 12 SEU's who did provide turnover figures, eight had a turnover of zero as they do not bring any income into the university. The remaining four turned over a combined £603,234 in the academic year 2011-12. However, £420,000 of this was accounted for by one university, therefore **we would conclude that in the main, SEU's are not currently a significant source of income for UK HEI's.**

Table 3: Could you find out what their estimated annual turnover is?

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Yes</b>	12	21.8
<b>No, they didn't know</b>	30	54.5
<b>No, they wouldn't say</b>	13	23.6
<b>Total</b>	55	100.0

### 4.3 Incentives for student enterprise

Figure 2: Student incentives for undertaking enterprise activity % (N=55)<sup>10</sup>



How universities and business incentivise and reward student placements and internships has been an issue of public concern, amid debates around exploitation and free labour. Whilst our focus is campus-based consultancy, we were interested in how HEI's manage this issue. Figure 2 shows that in every case, participating in enterprise activities is presented to students as something that will gain them industry experience, and thus beneficial for their future employability prospects. However, **our audit found that over 60% of Student Enterprise Units pay students in some way.** This could be seen as a promising indication that universities are placing value on their students' work. However, in most cases there was no guarantee of student payment, no set prices offered to clients, and so arrangements were generally much more ad hoc than our figure suggests. There is certainly nothing like a sector standard for payment to students for enterprise work.

### 4.4 Links between enterprise, education and research: models of SEU

In this section we see the emergence of some distinct models of student enterprise.

**Firstly, in the majority of cases (67.2%), work conducted by students through an SEU was as part of an assessed project.** This speaks to a model of student enterprise activity that is closely tied to the curriculum, typically a dissertation or final year project that is completed as a piece of consultancy. In this model, students will be given (or must find) an industrial client; the client will have provided a brief based on a particular challenge they face. The students – supervised by an academic advisor – aim to add value to that organization through their project. The projects undertaken in this model do not tend to be business-critical and the input from academic staff is usually restricted to advice on the project in student meetings. The academic does not normally directly contribute to the consultancy.

Table 4: Does the student consultancy form part of any assessed university work?

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Yes</b>	30	54.5
<b>No</b>	18	32.7
<b>Sometimes</b>	7	12.7
<b>Total</b>	55	100.0

The benefits of this model for the students are 'real' industry experience, an opportunity to apply their learning beyond the classroom and an opportunity to network and impress a potential employer. In some cases, the student will also get paid, though this is not always part of the SEU model. For the client, they get to work with soon-to-be graduates who they may wish to recruit, and they get potentially valuable consultancy for their organization at a low (or no) cost to themselves.

<sup>10</sup> Please note that we only counted incentives as publicised by the university. Some may offer more than they do not publicise.

Another model of student enterprise involves greater collaboration between staff and students, which often takes it away from assessed work. These SEU's are more likely to be positioned and branded as a stand-alone agency, and may undertake business-critical work for clients who will pay based on a set fees structure. However, this model is a minority venture: **only 7 (12.7%) of 55 SEU's involve collaboration between staff and students.** We should state that we defined collaboration as distinct from supervision of students by academics (and we did not count the latter). Collaboration implies partners who work together in co-creation, whereas supervision suggests one who oversees the work or tasks of another. Whilst we do accept that the line between the two can sometimes be blurred in academic supervision, we think there remains a semantic and practical distinction between them in how SEU's are designed and marketed to industry, students and staff. One way to see collaboration of this sort is to note that academics in such collaborations directly add value to the organisations involved.

The seven SEU's that are a collaboration between staff and students are:

- Grow Creative. University of Lancaster
- The Enterprise Collective. University of the Arts, London
- Creative Enterprise Bureau. Bournemouth University
- AdComs Research Centre. Buckinghamshire New University
- UK Progress. UCLAN
- The Agency. University College of Falmouth
- Unbranded (School of Art and Design). Nottingham Trent University

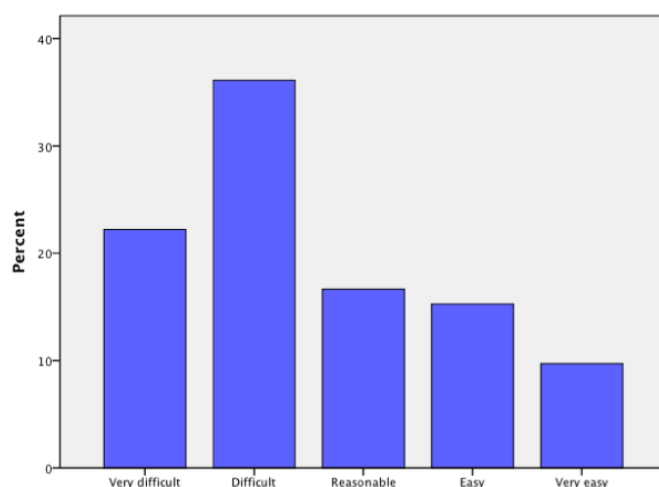
We also wanted to know whether staff collaborative enterprise activities fed into their research (and vice versa). In most instances this was not the case; **only eight (14.5%) SEU's were based around staff research**, and only four of these were also a staff/ student collaboration:

- Grow Creative. University of Lancaster
- Creative Enterprise Bureau. Bournemouth University
- AdComs Research Centre. Buckinghamshire New University
- Unbranded (School of Art and Design). Nottingham Trent University

## 4.5 The challenges of finding information about university business services

Once our researchers had finished collecting audit data, we asked them to rate how easy it was for them to find basic information about business services including students for each HEI. This assessment was firstly of website navigation: how easy it was to find business services, then how easy it was to find those involving students, and whether there were contact points and calls to action on the website that worked. Secondly, when they needed to use the contact points, they made a judgment as to their effectiveness at answering our queries.

Figure 3: How easy was finding information about business services? (Only includes HEI's that offer business services N= 144)



Our findings tell quite a disturbing picture: for over 58% of HEIs we found it either difficult or very difficult to find information on the nature of their business services. Our researchers kept notes of their attempts to get information from universities about their business services. Here are some examples of their notes:

*Required three phone calls within one week as the switchboard didn't know who to transfer me to and numbers rang with no voicemail service. Tried again twice the following week with no more luck.*

*There was no phone number provided for business consultancy, only an email address. However, I phoned the switchboard to see if I could reach the correct people through them but was transferred on five different occasions, sometimes being transferred for it to just ring and other times for nothing to happen and the line go dead. An email has been sent to the address provided with no answer.*

*Looking at the business pages you wouldn't know they did services in the business/ marketing area: these are only on the Business School page. Website goes in circles back to non-marketing services when you click through from business/ marketing page. Not good.*

*Services for business pages so incomplete that phone call required to understand what they offer to business. Business page instructs visitors to search for faculty listed under About Us section but it's not clear who I should call. Business Support and Consultancy page doesn't have hyperlinks to information.*

*Phoned the University five times and when put through to the receptionist she didn't know what the project was, and when putting me through to the Computer Science Department there was no answer. The enquiry form and email both did not work.*

*Website difficult to navigate, links from business services take you through to research centres, with no further info about the business services - as the focus becomes research promotion.*

*No business page linked to from home page, only a research page so had to navigate through several pages to find Business Team contacts.*

We would summarise the problems with finding information as follows:

- Too many websites have dead links, and enquiry forms that don't work.
- The phone numbers provided on business pages often take you through to a general switchboard, answered by someone who knows little about the university business services. This is usually a dead end for a potential client.
- Websites often have a complex design to the point of being impenetrable at times.
- Websites are often built from the inside out: therefore reflecting internal structures that often make little sense to a potential client. Business services are often spread across a range of schools that you would need to have knowledge of in order to find.

We would suggest that a significant amount of potential business could be being lost by the failure to design websites and information services that speak to business. And this is separate from the issue of internal accounting of student business services discussed in section 4.2.





# Case studies

The audit of student enterprise activity in marketing, media and creative industries across UK HEIs reveals a range of approaches, activities, tensions and benefits. In this section we analyse the outcomes of four more detailed case studies that elaborate these and suggest implications for the further developments of student enterprise activity in HEIs (the full case studies are in Appendix B). The case studies are:

1. The Creative Enterprise Bureau (CEB) at Bournemouth University. This is a recent SEU based in one department offering paid consultancy delivered through a collaboration between staff and students outside of formal teaching. Students are paid for their work.
2. The Student Media Project (SMP) at University of Gloucestershire. Based in the Media School, this is a semi-autonomous SEU run by graduates, but involving current students and supported by the HEI. It does not involve staff and is not connected with assessment. Clients are charged and students are paid for services
3. Venture Matrix (VM) at Sheffield Hallam University is a centrally run project providing assessed projects for units. Students are not paid and clients gain consultancy for a small registration fee.
4. Warwick Business School (WBS) Projects: run from the Business School at The University of Warwick. This SEU provides projects for postgraduate (MSc and MBA) students for their dissertations. Clients are not charged by WBS, but students often negotiate fees directly with clients. Staff supervise students.

This part of the report is divided into six sections. We start with a discussion about how student enterprise activities might be managed and organised within an HEI. We then discuss financial arrangements, including payment to HEIs, to students and to academic staff. We then consider how such activity is integrated with teaching and with research activities. In next two sections we review the reported benefits of activities and the tensions created by them.

Finally, we make a series of recommendations to HEI's on how this activity might best be undertaken.

## 5.1 Management and organisation of student enterprise

There are a number of options in the organisation of enterprise activity ranging from very 'local' (based in an academic group, or school) to 'global' (centrally run by the HEI). For example the Creative Enterprise Bureau (CEB) at Bournemouth is run from one academic group involving about 60 students a year, whereas Venture Matrix (VM) at Sheffield Hallam is centrally run and involves about 2000 students a year. Somewhere in between, Warwick Business School projects (WBS) are school based, providing enterprise opportunities for MBA and MSc students (approximately 130 projects per year are offered). Student Media Project (SMP) at University of Gloucestershire works slightly differently. Here the model is for a stand-alone business that retains its profits once full costs to the HEI are met. The latter model ensures autonomy and the adoption of a business model, although like the CEB, the impact on students and the HEI is also much lower (100 students involved over 2.5 years).

**Here there are issues of management and chains of command.** For example, where a unit is central it may benefit from economies of scale, and from a higher profile, but it may also be seen as a more distant support service and this raises issues of communication. Tutors need to be informed, or even 'sold' the services of the unit, for example VM staff report that some established tutors do not wish to work with the project. There is recognition in this case study that large projects take time to become established both externally, and significantly, also internally. On the other hand, centrally run units that are supported by senior managers are more autonomous when it comes to expanding their range of services, not least because they are not competing for school resources. For example, VM is centrally funded and a cost to the HEI, but staff working at the CEB suggest that there is pressure within their school for enterprise to bring in money (also see below).

**What does seem consistent though is the need for dedicated staff to develop business contacts and to work with tutors and students.** In some cases these staff are recent graduates, as in the case of SMP and CEB. In all cases though the organisation of enterprise activities is acknowledged as complex and in need of specialist skills. These include supporting students, managing expectations of clients, working with university services and working with academics; and we see a variety of models in terms of involvement of these different actors. Again, CEB and SMP have a small team of ex-graduates (1 and 2 respectively). The larger VM has 6 full time staff and 2 placement students working on it. WBS draws from the human resources of the 'Careers Plus' team. The larger, centrally run services seem to benefit from their status with the institution, managing their own affairs. However, the CEB report on-going difficulties in working with a wide range of central services such as accounts and marketing.

**A further issue of organisation is the relationship between student enterprise activity and specific course models.** For example, often the work is fully embedded in a module, and used for assessment (and the organisation of activity reflects this focus). In other cases the activity may be an option, for example as a dissertation project. Here students may elect to be involved, but the work remains part of assessment. Another approach is for the work to be entirely optional and un-assessed, instead building a student's CV. Related to these models is the amount of staff involvement. In some cases the central administrative work is attractive because tutors get assignments supported with little effort, for example as reported for VM and WBS. At the other extreme, staff are fully involved with projects, working along side students and directly with clients, as with the CEB (see below for further details).

## 5.2 Financial arrangements

**Our case studies also illustrate different approaches when it comes to financial arrangements.** Perhaps most important is the issue of charges to clients. In some cases clients are charged directly by the HEI based on the work undertaken, for example the CEB works like this, as does SMP. In other instances the clients pay an administration fee to register (e.g., for VM), but don't pay for the projects that students undertake (although VM waive the fee for smaller clients). And in other cases students negotiate a fee with the client (with the cost of administration and co-ordination, including finding clients, covered by the HEI), for example the MBA students as WBS. **Overall, there is an acceptance that this type of enterprise activity is not about profit for the HEI** (SMP aims to cover costs, returning 'profit' to the project, whereas CEB does not yet fully cover its costs despite charges to clients).

**There are also different approaches to paying students.** As noted, students may charge the client directly for their time and expenses, for example where MBA students already have valuable commercial experience (WBS). At other times students may undertake work for free as part of their assessed work and/or as work experience to build their CV. This is an emphasis in both VM and WBS. Alternatively students may be paid by the HEI for their time. Both CEB and SMP emphasise that students are paid for their work and that this is separate from assessed work. In both cases the rate is £10 per hour, significantly above the minimum wage.

In our case studies payment to staff is not illustrated. In some cases this may be because staff don't directly work on a project and only 'administer' it as part of teaching. In these cases staff see student enterprise as support for assessment and may value SEUs finding clients for organising live briefs, undertaking client management, and to some degree student management support that assists their teaching (again VM works this way). However in other cases staff have enterprise time (and therefore commitment) on their workloads and use this in these projects and in collaboration with students. This is the case with the CEB, for example. It is at least implied in our research here that direct consultancy with staff that doesn't involve students is not uncommon and here staff are more likely to be paid by clients. As direct payment to tutors in support of student enterprise activity seems unusual, we are unable to review the best system for doing this.

Financial arrangements must also be made for internal university projects (such as marketing and media production) and cases suggest that it's possible to use students to support these, for example the SMP makes use of students for internal work, as does VM. This may have several advantages. **Internal work supports the cost of units and provides regular 'work'. It also integrates the unit with other university functions and increases capacity for central services.** For example in the case of SMP, just under half the work undertaken is for internal projects. This presents a model not just of student enterprise, but of delivering HEI central services. The SMP (and VM) recognise that there is value (and potentially cost savings) to the institution in using students for at least some of its own internal marketing and media work.

## 5.3 Integration with teaching and research

**Our audit and case studies suggest that by far the most significant role for student enterprise units is to support teaching by providing live briefs and projects to students,** often related to work experience and/or assessment and indeed we see this in both VM and WBS. In the case of WBS, these projects form a significant option for Masters students and especially for MBA students. The work is the basis of their dissertations even though there is a separation between the consultancy they provide and the documents they submit for assessment. For Venture Matrix the projects form assessments across a range of modules across the university. This is seen to meet a need for entrepreneurial education and is formalised in assessment strategy. However, for other units (the CEB and SMP) the agenda for entrepreneurial education is largely met through voluntary work that is not assessed (but is paid). Overall however, the main justification for student enterprise is the support of education. It is also clear that related to this, the HEI use such units to promote their courses. Enterprise, whether it is paid and voluntary, or part of assessment, is presented as 'added value'. The significance of being able to claim this is justification for the cost of running units, even where they have no revenue.

**Links to research seem much more limited,** although our cases show how this is possible, especially the CEB. In such cases staff are much more active in their collaboration with students working on projects. Indeed in some cases where the activity is limited to student assessment, academic may staff have very little input to the project itself and may not have any contact with business clients. The implication is that student enterprise projects may be reduced to 'central assessment support units', where they are largely remote from staff research activity. This is also seen in projects such as VM where an emphasis is on non-critical business work and projects that fit within the academic calendar (see below). The attraction of closer links to research is more meaningful collaborations and the potential for REF impact cases.

Outside this audit and our cases it seems clear however that academic staff work with businesses and other organisations on consultancy that is based on their research. It's the integration of *research, teaching and consultancy* in a collaborative and paid form that seems rare, although there is the possibility that student projects lead to relationships between organisations and HEIs that lead to other academic-lead consultancy work.

## 5.4 Benefits of enterprise activity

In our case study work we specifically asked participants about their understanding of the benefits of student enterprise work. As already stated, **student enterprise seems to primarily add value to degree programmes by providing experiences that build student CVs and give them access to business networks and potential employers.** All the case studies demonstrate that students especially value such opportunities and HEIs seem willing to subsidise the cost of such activity in order to add value to degree programmes. This may be increasingly important given recent changes in student fees. The use of strong internal and external promotion highlights the role of such activity in enhancing the student experience.

**Staff also welcome support in developing such entrepreneurial education, usually linked to assessments.** Apart from the 'promotional' opportunities of adding value to programmes, students report that they do learn useful business and consultancy skills through engagement with these projects. Often the contrast made is that such work is 'real'. In the case of the WBS, the CEB and SMP the student experience is potential more 'real' in that there are opportunities to be paid and therefore a need to meet a professional standard of work. For the CEB there is also a 'mentoring' role where students work alongside academics. The benefit here is that as a paid consultancy, much of the cost of this mentoring is met by clients rather than the HEI. Further, with the CEB, students report that they 'see academics in new light', recognising their skill and expertise outside of the lecture room. Such projects also therefore enhance the credibility of tutors with students and build respect. This seems significant because **rather than students feeling that research and consultancy are remote, taking tutors away from time with students, students see the activities as important and integrated.**

**In addition, but to a lesser degree, students benefit when enterprise activities are paid.** In some cases this is formalised and organised by the enterprise unit (CEB and SMP); in other cases it is up to the students to negotiate their fee. Many students report, however, that they are willing to work for free (in return for the benefits of CV enhancement, for example) and evidence for this is seen in WBS and VM. The issue then is possibly one of ethics. Where clients pay for services (beyond the small administration fee that VM charge), it would seem unreasonable for the HEI to retain fees, whilst getting students to work for free.

**Where research staff do collaborate with students on enterprise projects that builds directly from their research there is the added benefit of building a research culture** in departments and this might be increasingly desirable where there is more pressure to conduct research with 'impact'. The CEB is an illustration of this, but overall this approach is yet to be widely adopted in the sector (see our audit data above).

**There is also good evidence from all the case studies that businesses, both regional and national, benefit greatly from student enterprise work and their feedback is overwhelmingly positive.** This is again a key reason for HEI support for such projects. All our cases demonstrate very significant engagement with industry and meaningful knowledge exchange. Large projects like WBS and VM suggest that where HEIs develop large-scale consultancy services there can be an impact of local and regional businesses. For example, VM do lots of work with SMEs and new start-ups that may not be able to afford commercial consultancy work.

## 5.5 Tensions in enterprise activities

Our cases also reveal potential tensions or issues in the delivery of student enterprise activity that need to be resolved. Firstly, **where activity is aligned with assessment, there are significant timing issues.** Projects need to fit within a pre-defined academic calendar including time for projects to be proposed, developed and then undertaken. For example for WBS projects, and despite an emphasis on business-critical work, the projects are limited to the summer period when students undertake dissertations. Similarly, the VM projects need to fit with module schedules. This limits the responsiveness of student enterprise to business needs as business timescales (short and flexible) clash with the seasonal and slower processes of course delivery. Other models of enterprise, however, do allow for flexibility, based on staff responsiveness and collaborations with students outside of formal teaching and assessment, for example CEB and SMP. Here then, enterprise needs to be separate from modules and assessment in order to be responsive to business needs.

Cases also suggest limitations in student experience and ability. These vary. For example MBA students at WBS are presented as competent and experienced and may charge a fee as a result. Undergraduates are considered less trustworthy on their own (for example due to a lack of experience) and as a result may not be trusted with 'business critical' projects. For example, this is the experience at VM with undergraduates. There are also issues of support and advice needed and here there are considerations of the role of academic tutors and support staff. Students need guidance. Again, one case study (the CEB) demonstrates that tutor/student collaborations mitigate for any limitations in student experience or ability. In other cases there are varying degrees of quality assurance and intervention from both centre staff and academics, for example tutors at WBS may contact clients even though their focus is on supporting the student. Again **the result is that enterprise that is focussed on student needs, is potentially less useful for businesses.** The issue is again the active involvement of academic staff, working with students, and on projects that are not subject to the constraints of programme content and assessment.

**In addition, and as already suggested above, there are issues of cost.** Many small business have limited resources. The result is that there is demand for 'free' advice in the form of student projects and this is an attraction for businesses of this form of knowledge exchange. However these come with the limitations already identified. But the units themselves also need to be funded. Here there is the possibility of subsidy from HEIs based on the identified benefits for the student experience, and possibly other benefits such as follow-up consultancy that is paid, or REF impact case studies. In other cases – again the CEB and SMP – there are efforts to recover the full economic cost of units, but this seems elusive. **So the tension is between serving the needs of small, cash-poor businesses, and ensuring revenue covers costs.**

There are further issues relating to growth and management of these units. In some cases the early identification of a student enterprise unit's potential by senior staff, and the subsequent support they give, has resulted in expansion to more areas of the university and extra staff and resources such that units engage with more businesses and students. In other cases the unit remains parochial, limited in scope to just a few degree programmes, although this might maintain benefits of focus and buy-in by staff and students (although staff reward, or workload management for such activity also remains unresolved throughout the projects in the audit and this might be linked to buy-in). Certainly as units get larger, internal communication and buy-in becomes more important. **The tension then is to manage the size of SEUs to balance benefits for industry and students with the needs for staff buy-in and cohesion.** In addition, managing the profile of SEUs is important. Our audit data reveals just how hard it is for external organisations to find SEUs, not least because even when calls are made, reception or business services staff don't know of their existence. Here central support services such as marketing and communications need to be aware of and support SEUs.



# Conclusions and Recommendations for HEIs

Whilst there seems little doubt about the overall value of student engagement in enterprise, ultimately the model of student enterprise that is adopted by any HEI is likely to be based on the priorities of the institution.

As HEIs develop SEUs a number of decisions need to be made and our audit and cases studies highlight these. HEIs need to consider: (1) the scope and organisation of projects (locally, versus centrally managed); (2) the types of work undertaken (size of organisation and business critical versus supplementary work); (3) the financial model (whether projects charge clients and pay students); (4) integration with teaching (whether projects form assessment); (5) integration with research (including the role of tutors in the consultancy project).

Projects vary in scope, but **it seems clear that larger projects (and therefore those that have the most impact on HEIs, their students, and external organisations) are likely to be centrally run.** Here we see a key role for senior managers to support projects, especially financially, however additional support in the form of advocacy is also required. There is a balance needed though. Smaller projects may have more 'buy in' from staff involved, especially tutors. This is important if a SEU is to be more than an 'assessed project clearing house', for example if staff are to be directly involved in consultancy with students. The senior management role then is to identify projects that have the potential for institution-wide impact and to support their growth and development. It might also be recognised that this can be a slow process, taking several years or more as internal processes and relationships are worked through and external client lists and awareness are developed. For all of the successful SEUs we examined, it was clear that there was significant risk associated with them in their early years, and results could have gone one way or another. But they had a combination of buy-in from senior managers who were prepared to take a risk, and the ownership the SEU

project by somebody (or a team) with vision and drive.

In many ways the projects reviewed here are conservative in their aims, focussing on assessment support and less critical knowledge exchange. If one role for knowledge exchange is to disseminate key skills to industry, student projects may have limited impact where they are restricted to non-business critical, and unpaid student projects. This also suggests that where more business critical work is undertaken by HEI staff, it is not integrated with teaching and may even detract from it (as staff focus on such consultancy rather than teaching). HEIs might rightly opt for the more conservative option here, but there are examples where knowledge exchange that may have more impact on organisations is undertaken. These types of activity may even be more attractive given the agenda of 'impact'. **Here then there is scope for HEIs to develop, expand, or adapt student enterprise models to incorporate more staff research and involvement**

A key priority within HE is the student experience and the agendas of employability and entrepreneurship. This is a key justification for Student Enterprise Units and this includes a willingness to subsidise the cost of running projects (or in some cases carrying the full cost). **An institutional decision here is therefore the balance of benefits and costs.** There is a suggestion that in some cases the desire for revenue is stronger than in others, but overall student involvement in enterprise is not seen as a significant source of revenue. Again this may be a lost opportunity. Where more 'strategic' projects are undertaken using students (in collaboration with staff), there is evidence that clients will pay for work. There is also the issue of paying students and again, the more meaningful the consultancy (i.e., where clients recognise specialist skills that add value to their business), the greater the likelihood that students will be paid.

Overall then we might think of two extremes of student enterprise model. The first is where a HEI supports live projects for students that are undertaken as part of course assessment. Clients get potentially useful work that is often not business critical, staff get support with complex assessment procedures, and students get 'real life' experience. At the other extreme (and less common) staff research is integrated with consultancy and supported by students as an extra curricular activity. Clients get potentially higher-level consultancy, staff find practical applications for their research work, and students get experience in consultancy and get paid to do it. In many respects this might be seen as an extension of the idea behind KTP projects into the routine work of both staff and current students and in a form that is more accessible to many external organisations.

We might also see these extremes in terms of the relationship between different agendas in HE. The first model is largely restricted to teaching. Here research and high level KE are separate agendas (although there might be links). The latter approach integrates KE, research and education. An advantage here is that such KE may be more efficient. Work undertaken adds value to the student experience, helps support research agendas, and provides higher-level KE to external clients. The disadvantage is the complexity of making such projects work and that complexity increases with size of the enterprise unit. Such approaches require commitment from staff at all levels, rather than a separately supported and possibly centralised support team. This may account for the dominance of the former approach across the sector. Nevertheless, given the potential benefits (again, potential revenue, demonstration of impact, application of research, and paid work for students) experimentation with this type of student enterprise is likely worthwhile.

#### **Below is a summary of key recommendations in developing Student Enterprise Units:**

**1. Ensure adequate resources.** In particular, ensure that where smaller projects are introduced, they are fully supported by central services and by managers.

**2. Senior management buy-in is therefore a key ingredient of successful SEUs.** Here, managers must be prepared to take risks on ventures that may take several years to take off.

**3. To encourage staff buy-in to a project, communicate SEU's internally, including their core aims.** Support from senior managers is important here to ensure buy-in and commitment from staff.

**4. SEU's offer a promising model for HEI's who want to engage in more local business engagement,** though smaller clients may not be able to afford paid consultancy. In such circumstances unpaid student projects, motivated by assessment, provide HEIs with KE engagement (but at a cost to the HEI).

5. Where the emphasis is on assessment, students are generally not paid for their work, however **where students undertake optional consultancy, they should be paid above minimum wage.** Currently, there is still a grey area where some SEU consultancy projects that are assessed charge clients and some don't. **Where HEI's feel confident in their students' ability to add value to a client, we would encourage them to develop transparent fee structures for clients rather than leave it to students to negotiate.**

**6. Consider the restrictions of the academic calendar.** Where student enterprise is integrated within assessment, there are significant restrictions in terms of timing and quality that limited potential KE benefits for companies; where the student enterprise is optional, paid and in collaboration with academic staff, these limitations may be overcome.

**7. Student Enterprise Units can be used for internal work.** This supports their costs and provides valuable additional services for HEIs.

8. Student enterprise work provides meaningful educational experiences and this **may be presented by HEI as 'added value' for courses.**

**9. Like any business services, SEUs need to be easily found by external organisations.** This requires marketing support, including clear presence on websites for business services and effective inbound telephone procedures. Websites must be designed with external clients in mind.

**10. There should be better accounting of student enterprise units.** Often there is little knowledge of their turnover or amount of students/ staff involved in them. This makes evaluation of their benefits and impact difficult.

11. Collaboration between staff and students is rare, as are staff/ student collaborative services that involve staff research. Yet the potential benefits of such approaches seem clear. **HEIs should consider ways of integrating staff and student consultancy,** as we found them to be largely separate ventures.

12. Hardly touched on here (but apparent nevertheless) is the incentive for staff to undertake such work. This remains an unresolved issue. There appears to be patchy academic staff involvement in SEU activity and issues of staff competence/skills in such work are not well known. **HEI's should make sure that staff engagement in enterprise activities are sufficiently recognised and rewarded.**



## Appendix A. Overview of Student Enterprise Units

Aberystwyth University	Access to Masters
Aston University	MBA consultancy
Bournemouth University	Creative Enterprise Bureau
Bournemouth University	RedBalloon
Buckinghamshire New University	AdComs research centre
Coventry University	Student Projects
Cranfield University	Unbranded
Glyndwr University	GO Wales
Kingston University	No Brand
Leeds Trinity University College	In-House
London Metropolitan University	LMBS- Business Works
Nottingham Trent University	Unbranded
Sheffield Hallam University	The Employability Hub/The Alchemy Exchange
Sheffield Hallam University	Venture matrix
Southampton Solent University	Solent Creatives
Staffordshire University	Unitemps
Swansea Metropolitan University	Go Wales
Swansea University	Go Wales
The Univeristy of Sunderland	Employee Engagement Team/Business Gateway
The Univeristy of Surrey	Unitemps
The University of Bath	Undergraduate projects
The University of Bath	MBA Projects
The University of Birmingham	MBA Projects
The University of Bradford	MBA projects
The University of Bristol	ENACTUS
The University of Bristol	InHouse Media
The University of Cambridge	MBA Cambridge Venture Project
The University of Cambridge	Management Studies Tripos (MST) Project
The University of Central Lancashire	UK Progress
The University of East Anglia	Student projects
The University of Hull	student projects
The University of Lancaster	UNITE
The University of Lancaster	Grow creative
The University of Liverpool	No Brand
The University of Manchester	The Manchester Business School
The University of Northumbria at Newcastle	Unbranded
The University of Oxford	The Student Consultancy

The University of Sheffield	MBA Projects
The University of Warwick	Unitemps
The University of Warwick	Student Projects
University College of Falmouth	Cartel Photos
University College of Falmouth	The Agency
University for the Creative Arts	Creative Challenge
The University of Bedfordshire	Enactus (formerly SIFE)
The University of Cumbria	UNITE
The University of Derby	Unbranded
The University of Durham	Unbranded
The University of Essex	Postgraduate consultancy
The University of Glamorgan	GO Wales
The University of Gloucestershire	Student Media Project
University of the Arts London	The Enterprise Collective
University of the Arts London	Central St Martins
The University of Wales, Newport	Go Wales
The University of Wales, Trinity Saint David	Go Wales
The University of West London	Student Led Projects