

BUSINESS CONSULTANCY BY STUDENTS AND STAFF: VENTURE MATRIX

Summary

Venture Matrix is an exemplar of an enterprise education initiative that has been scaled across the university embedding real-world consultancy projects into the curriculum. The programme adds significant value to student employability, brings the curriculum to life whilst increasing university visibility in the local business community, creating significant impact on local businesses, social enterprises, charities and public-sector organisations.

Full Case Study

Venture Matrix is the largest university student consultancy project in the UK and the biggest provider of free consulting in South Yorkshire, one of the poorest and least economically productive regions of northern Europe. The region is predominately SME.

Unparalleled in its scope, scale and ambition, Venture Matrix offers high-quality supervised consultancy to business, charities and not-for-profit organisations delivered pro bono by students and staff from every faculty.

Currently celebrating its tenth anniversary, Venture Matrix is a palpable example of how a university can be a real-world partner offering service to its community as a core part of student learning. Sheffield Hallam University students carry out projects that support organisations to tackle strategic and operational issues. They offer valuable services such as consumer research, product design ideas and marketing material.

Students undertake projects as part of their studies, supervised by academic staff. They operate in teams to take a brief from the client, undertake site visits, conduct in-depth research into the organisation, analyse the issues and produce advice and supporting data. They then deliver a presentation and report for their client's use. Most (81%) are small firms based in Sheffield City Region.

Every project offers tangible help to organisations that enable them to solve problems or seize opportunities that due to cost, time or capacity may not be addressed otherwise. For example, during 2015-16 Venture Matrix worked with Stoney Middleton Heritage Centre Community Group to develop a heritage centre celebrating the village's rich history. Over the past few years students conducted research on establishing and funding heritage centres, explored inward investment options from overseas, investigated national and international tourism impact, delivered workshops for pupils in the village, created video and animated web content, produced digital and printed marketing materials and built and installed an installation exhibited in a Sheffield gallery. This culminated in 2016 with the group announcing the building of the heritage centre.

As part of the Accor Hotels' 50th anniversary celebrations, the Venture Matrix teams were recognised in their 'Outstanding contribution to the local community' award.

Key Outcomes in 2015/2016

- 1,861 students helped clients.
- 276 projects were delivered for 144 organisations – 52% businesses, 40% voluntary sector and 7% public sector.
- Total consultancy value was £352,500.
- Clients included: 43 schools, 21 charities, 16 manufacturers, 12 retailers, 9 social enterprises, 4 designers, 4 IT developers, 2 local authorities, 1 care home and 1 football club.
- Projects included: 41 marketing/market research, 28 international business consultancy, 27 business consultancy, 24 journalism/PR, 24 social media, 11 criminology, 11 interior design, 8 computing, 7 graphic design, 7 filming/AV, 6 web design, 5 occupational health, 5 sport/physiotherapy, 4 drama, and 3 app designs.

An economic impact study published in February 2017 showed that since 2013-14 Venture Matrix has contributed £1.7 million value to the local community through more than 1,150 projects on behalf of 433 organisations and involving almost 5,000 students. Of the projects, around 500 were with charities or not-for-profit organisations. 93% of clients said that Venture Matrix met, exceeded or greatly exceeded expectations. 76% of clients said the process of working with Venture Matrix was excellent.