University of Southampton

STUDENT INNOVATION PROJECTS

Employer Handbook

CONTENTS

Contact us:
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Book an online meeting with the
Employer Engagement Team.

WELCOME

At the University of Southampton, we believe that innovation thrives when bright ideas meet real-world challenges. **Student Innovation Projects** connect ambitious students with organisations to create fresh, actionable solutions that make an impact.

For our stakeholders, this is more than a four-week project, it's a chance to tap into the energy, creativity, and insight of talented, multidisciplinary teams who bring a new perspective to your business or community challenge. You'll gain thoughtful recommendations, practical solutions, and the satisfaction of shaping the next generation of problem-solvers.

Whether it's refining your marketing strategy, exploring sustainability opportunities, or unlocking new avenues for growth, our students are ready to rise to the challenge. In return, your involvement offers them an invaluable taste of real-world business issues and inspires innovative and collaborative approaches from all sides.

We invite you to join us in this unique exchange of knowledge, skills, and fresh thinking.

Together, we are creating meaningful change.

WHAT IS A STUDENT INNOVATION PROJECT?

A Student Innovation Project is a 'research and recommendations' style project, enabling local businesses, charities and not-for-profit organisations to present students with a business issue of importance to their organisation. The projects last for four weeks from start to finish and must be exclusive to University of Southampton students.

One or two teams of four to five students will then propose innovative solutions to overcome your business issue. They will present their findings to you at the end of the project and will provide you with a business report. Each student is expected to work on the project for four to six hours per week. Please note that due to the project only being four weeks, the students will be unable to produce primary research. They can, however, analyse existing data provided by your organisation.

Applying for the Student Innovation Projects is a competitive process, so we cannot guarantee that submitting a brief for review will result in a place on the programme.

"
Felt supported by the uni team throughout and there was little admin time our end to get the project up and running which was a plus for us! The application form (brief) was simple to complete and asked just the right amount of information without it feeling too overwhelming"

Mike Evans, Sound Pop Academy

ORGANISATION ELIGIBILITY

We work with organisations of all sizes and within all sectors; however, you must hold Public Liability insurance for the entirety of the project.

Whilst most of the projects are within the local area to give students the opportunity to visit the organisation, we will consider projects further afield if they offer something different to the students, and the organisation can commit to visiting the University to watch the student presentations.

TIMINGS

The projects run over five rounds between October and March each academic year. We take submissions for project briefs between August and December.

COST

There is no cost for organisations to participate in the Student Innovation Projects, other than your time.

We encourage students to visit the organisation's premises for meetings and the final presentation where possible, and the University will provide reasonable travel expenses to the students for this.

STUDENTS

Student Innovation Projects are very popular with students. Students from all year groups and all subjects are eligible to take part, and where possible, we deliberately create inter-disciplinary teams to simulate a team working environment in an organisation. Students will not necessarily be aligned to a specific project because of their degree subject.

Students must apply through MyCareer, our careers platform, to take part. They are asked to upload a CV and answer two application questions:

→ Why do you wish to participate in a Student Innovation Project?

→ What skills and experience can you bring?

After the closing date, applications will be shortlisted by the Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise team, and suitable students will be selected. Once selected, students must complete mandatory training to ensure that they are equipped to work on your project. This training will include information about building relationships, being innovative and creative, working effectively as a team and the principles of project management.

AVERAGE ANNUAL PARTICIPATION STATS

763 **students** applied for a place on the programme

226 **students** were selected

25 **projects** completed

YOUR INVOLVEMENT

As part of the Student Innovation Projects, you will be required to:

→ Write a Project Brief outlining the business issue, providing a suitable title, context where needed, and three to four clear aims. More information can be found under '**Writing Your Project Brief**' (page 11). The Project Brief will need to be returned to us with a copy of our completed Health and Safety Form and a copy of your Public Liability Policy

→ Provide the names and contact details of at least two people within the organisation who are available throughout the project and can support the students and answer any ad-hoc questions as and when needed. If you are a sole trader and this is not possible, we will need your commitment that you will be available throughout the project and answer any questions within a reasonable timeframe

→ Sign and return our Client Terms and Conditions once your project has been approved and we have confirmed which round you are participating in

→ Meet with the students, either in person or virtually, during the first week of the project

→ Provide ongoing support to the students throughout the project, usually via email or telephone

→ Attend an in-person presentation by the students during the final week, either at your premises or at the University

→ Provide feedback to the students via a survey sent by the Employer Engagement Team

> "
> **The whole process was easy, and the end product was genuinely fascinating, presented well, and real food for thought"**
> **Ed Adams, Anvil Arts**

EXAMPLE PROJECTS

Recent projects have included:

→ Improving marketing/social media strategies

→ Redesigning a staff room

→ Increasing customer base/engagement and improving customer experience

→ Competitor analysis

→ Promoting staff diversity/retention/engagement

→ Adopting eco-friendly practices to reduce an organisation's carbon footprint

→ Improved ways of being sustainable/energy efficient

→ Fundraising/sponsorship opportunities

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

→ **A written report and presentation, providing a detailed overview of the students' recommendations.**

→ **An additional resource, providing dedicated consulting skills to a business issue.**

→ **Access to high-calibre students at a university ranked among the top 100 globally.**

→ **Insightful recommendations and fresh approaches.**

HOW TO APPLY

1 Complete a Project Brief Form, and return to us, together with a completed Health and Safety Form and proof of your Public Liability insurance. Alternatively, if you need some help, email the Employer Engagement team (employ@southampton.ac.uk) who will be happy to discuss your project idea.

2 We will review your project and respond with any questions and provide feedback.

3 Once your project is approved, we will provide you with our Client Terms and Conditions, which you will need to complete and return before the project starts.

"
This is our second year participating in the Student Innovation Projects. The whole process, from creating our brief to hosting the presentations is always highly enjoyable and really well supported. The calibre of students and their ideas and presentations is so high, we can use their reports to positively impact our charity immediately. Thank you!"

Tori Reid, The Pillar

TIMELINE

STEP ONE
Complete the Client Brief Form and return to us along with proof of your Public Liability Insurance

STEP TWO
Project reviewed by Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise

STEP THREE
If successful, we will confirm which round you will be in, and you will be asked to complete our Client Terms and Conditions

STEP FOUR
Student teams are selected and they attend mandatory training sessions

STEP FIVE
During the first week of the project starting, you will meet with your student team(s), either in person or virtually

STEP SIX
Throughout the four weeks, provide any support required to your student team(s) as needed
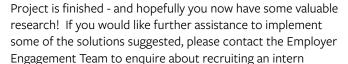
STEP SEVEN
During week four, the team(s) will send you their business report, and you will watch their presentation(s) (either at your premises or at the University)

STEP EIGHT
Following the presentations, provide feedback to the teams via a survey sent by the Employer Engagement Team

STEP NINE
Project is finished - and hopefully you now have some valuable research! If you would like further assistance to implement some of the solutions suggested, please contact the Employer Engagement Team to enquire about recruiting an intern

WRITING YOUR PROJECT BRIEF

Complete our **Project Brief Form** to outline your business issue and provide some context, however the Employer Engagement Team can work with you to get this right!

Please ensure that the project has a suitable title and three to four clear aims, which must be achievable within the four week period. The students will receive a copy of the brief ahead of the project starting, so it is essential that the information is relevant and easy for them to understand. They will be able to ask you further questions during their initial meeting with you in week one.

Example Aims:

Social Media Marketing Strategy
→ Research which marketing/social media platforms would be best to engage with our different groups of stakeholders and make suggestions on days/times of posts.
→ Propose how we might increase engagement, and provide examples of engaging and accessible content that might be useful to the different groups, considering layout, colours, fonts, graphics etc.
→ Provide short-term and long-term strategies for engagement with our various stakeholders.

Competitor Analysis
→ Research the competition's strengths and weaknesses, and how we compare.
→ Research threats and opportunities for the future.
→ Research how to create effective competitive market positioning and differentiation.

Understanding Grant-Making Bodies
→ Create a visual of the grant funding pipeline – outline where we have either gained funds or had bids rejected in the last 3-5 years and include those in motion.
→ Research and explore a 'range' of grant-making bodies, their funding criteria and how these might align with our charitable objectives.
→ Suggest and prioritise next steps for making funding applications based on findings.

Sustainability
→ **Food Waste Reduction:** Identify and recommend strategies to minimise food waste in our kitchen and dining operations. This includes analysing current processes, portions and meal planning.
→ **Food Waste Utilisation:** Explore ways to repurpose and utilise food waste efficiently. This may involve composting, creating animal feed, or other innovative approaches.
→ **Education and Awareness:** Suggest ideas for educational materials and campaigns to raise awareness about food waste among children and staff. Propose ways to promote understanding of its environmental impact and encourage responsible consumption.

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

There are many other ways you can reach and engage with our students, such as:

→ Academic or Research and Development Collaborations with the University
→ Advertising Opportunities
→ Career Mentoring
→ Careers Fairs
→ E-Mentoring
→ Employer Events
→ Undergraduate Internships and Graduate Internships
→ Year in Employment Placements

If you would like to find out more about any of the above opportunities, please contact us on +44 (0)23 8059 3501, employ@southampton.ac.uk, or book an appointment with the Employer Engagement Team

Find out more:
www.southampton.ac.uk/careers/employers