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## *European Symposium on Sustainability in Business Education, Research and Practices*

**Environmental impact reduction micro-placements: An opportunity to overcome students' reluctance to undertake a long-term work experience placement whilst stimulating environmental improvements in businesses?**

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## OUTLINE

1. Introduction: The changing context of work experience placements
2. Purpose of the paper: Rethinking placement opportunities & outcomes of Student-led Environmental Improvement Consultancy Project (pilot)
3. Approach: Environmental impact reduction micro-placements
4. Results achieved: Outcomes for students & employers
5. Next steps & opportunities



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# 1. INTRODUCTION: The changing context of work experience placements

- Student placements have long been recognised as an opportunity for extra-curricular real-world learning and a valuable route into work experience
  - Traditionally, student placements have been ‘a year in industry’
  - The personal, professional and academic benefits to the placement student are well established (e.g., Bullock, Gould and Hejmadi, 2009; Elarde and Chong, 2012; Saniter and Saniter, 2014; Ismail, 2018; Institute of Student Employers, 2021)
  - Resource benefits to the placement employer are less well recognised (e.g., Maertz et al, 2014; Finch et al, 2016)
- But ..... and there’s always a BUT with students and businesses!!



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# 1. INTRODUCTION: The changing context of work experience placements

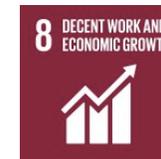
- ..... a year in industry is now becoming less attractive for students
- ..... managing a placement for a year is increasingly challenging for employers
- ..... the pressure for businesses to act sustainably is increasing
- But students need work experience and sustainability knowledge to be considered 'work ready' and a likely candidate for a graduate job
- And businesses need the sustainability skills we are teaching



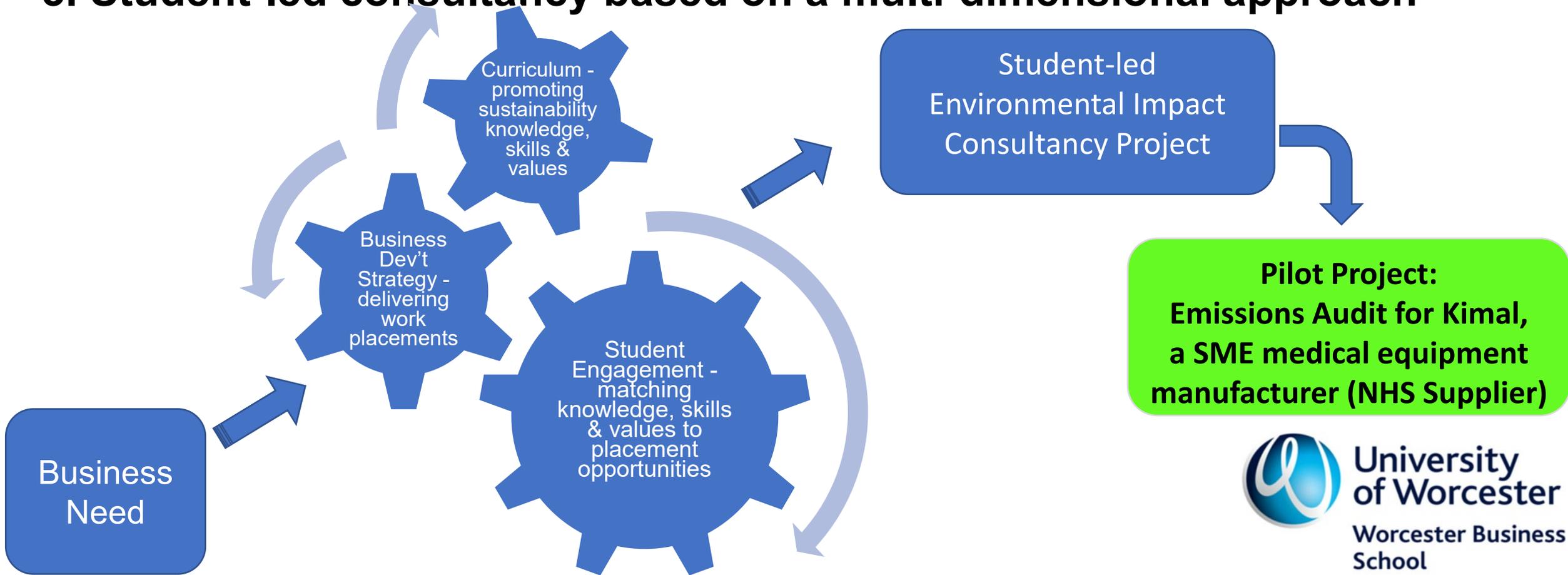
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## 2. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER: An alternative placement opportunity

- The Student-led Environmental Consultancy Programme was established to overcome challenges of a year in industry; it offers a less challenging route into work experience for students & lower cost access to skilled resource for businesses
  - 3-month part time, paid micro-placements are offered in which a student undertakes an environmental impact improvement project – all start with an Environmental Audit to establish the company's performance baseline
  - Businesses are provided with affordable, skilled resource to complete an environmental impact improvement project & suggest improvement actions
  - The recruiting business works with WBS to define the scope of their project & student's role



### 3. Student-led consultancy based on a multi-dimensional approach



## 4. RESULTS ACHIEVED: Business outcomes from the pilot project

- The project defined the extent of the company's emissions problem (previously suspected); it was a bigger problem than they thought. This is particularly important as the NHS requires all suppliers to have a plan to achieve zero Scope 1 & 2 emissions to quote for business.
- The project highlighted the emissions problem is perceived within the business as everyone's problem; therefore, it is no one's problem.
- The data analysis conducted presented information with which to make evidence-based decisions on sourcing, logistics & stock holding practice.
- The placement student's report was communicated to all staff and a series of environmental improvement targets have been set with senior managers allocated as owners.
- The data presented by the student will be used as evidence for their EcoVardis supply chain accreditation (required for NHS tenders).
- The senior management team are now acting to rethink their sustainability organisation and staff responsibilities.



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## 4. RESULTS ACHIEVED: Student Outcomes

- “The main reason to undertake this project was to gain practical knowledge of Sustainability along with the academic knowledge”
- “I have gained professional experience working on this project. I could correlate my academic knowledge with the tasks, and it gave me new insights and an understanding of sustainability. This helped me to decide on my research project. I am glad that this opportunity opened up new avenues for me on the professional front and weight to my CV.”
- “I learned presentation skills, preparing visual data, working on excel spreadsheets”
- “I learned to communicate my ideas and thoughts effectively”



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## 5. NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Expand the Student-led Environmental Consultancy Programme to provide more environmental impact improvement opportunities for local organisations.
2. Extend the student-led consultancy micro-placement offering to include additional topics e.g., carbon literacy training.
3. Create 1-month micro-placements.



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# THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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