Consulting

LSE Consulting

KEI Lunch and Learn – 6 March 2023

Today you will learn about

- What LSE Consulting does and what support is available for academic consulting.
- How to find opportunities to do consultancy work.
- How to apply for opportunities and develop proposals.
- How projects are implemented together with LSE Consulting
- What are the key norms and ethics aspects to consider.
- Reasons to engage in consulting.

LSE Consulting

What is LSE Consulting?

Who is LSE Consulting?

- LSE Consulting is a team within LSE Research and Innovation that manages consulting activity via LSE's subsidiary: LSE Enterprise Ltd.
- **We drive consultancy activity** by bringing opportunities to academics.
- **We offer flexible support** to academics who wish to undertake consultancy work as well as LSE departments, centres and institutes.

What is academic consulting?

- This type of consulting involves conducting research on behalf of a client who needs to produce high-quality research on a specific topic. Some key features are:
  - The general and specific objectives are predetermined by the client.
  - The methods or approach to address those objectives are also predefined by the client.
  - The client also establishes project milestones and durations.
  - The research outputs (data, IP, reports) generated for the project might not be available for public use.

Examples of consultancy work

- Examples of academic consulting activity include:
  - Literature reviews (Rapid Evidence Reviews, Systematic Reviews, etc.)
  - Policy reviews (examining a specific policy or a set of policies)
  - Conducting primary or secondary research in a limited timeframe and developing recommendations for policy or practice.
  - Evaluating interventions or programmes (ex-ante, process, ex-post).

Support provided by LSE Consulting

- Contract management with clients and subcontractors.
- Proposal development for public procurement and ad hoc consulting (assembling a team, admin requirements, budgeting, etc.)
- Project management support (with different levels of involvement).
- Conducting research (depending on the area of expertise).

Identifying opportunities

Where to search?

Types of opportunities

- Unique from grants
- Independent project – private; public; non-profit
- Framework Contracts and call-downs

Where to find opportunities

- Tender portals (tenders direct; govt; UN marketplace; private)
- LSE Consulting's new opportunity platform: OppsLink
- Leveraging networks
- Common terminology:
  - Invitation to Tender (ITT); Request for Proposals (RFP); Request for Quote (RFQ);
  - Terms of Reference (TOR); Specifications

Proposal development

Applying for an opportunity

Proposal components

- Public tenders and private engagements have different requirements, but generally all proposals include the following elements:
  - An overview of the organisation.
  - A background section demonstrating understanding of the policy context and the project objectives.
  - A description of the methods or approach that will be employed to address the objectives.
  - The team who will deliver the project, their responsibilities and time committed to the project.
  - The project timeline and specification of deliverables.
  - A description of quality assurance steps and risk management.
  - The proposed budget (per deliverable or based on the breakdown of staff days per task)

Feasibility considerations

- Do we meet the expertise requirements? What can we do to strengthen our proposed team?
- Do we have the capacity to conduct the primary research / engagement activities?
- Can we deliver the assignment in the proposed timeline?
- Can we propose a reasonable design within the established budget?

Expertise requirements

- Consulting assignments specify different requirements which **might** include:
  - Years of experience in the topic
  - Connection to certain organisations or access to the target population
  - Publications related to the specific field
  - Language proficiency
- Several ways to meet these requirements
  - Assembling a consortium of two or more suppliers that meet the requirements jointly.
  - Bringing external experts from other research institutions or independent consultants.
  - Hiring junior researchers (RAs) to support research implementation.
  - Researchers and organisations can be located in different countries.

Capacity to deliver

- Consulting assignments usually ask to:
  - Demonstrate the capacity to deliver by providing examples of past projects (similar topics, similar size/duration, similar population/location).
  - Show experience of implementing projects in locations relevant to the project.
  - Explain how the team will gain access to the target population, existing secondary data, etc.
- All these can be covered by establishing consortiums/partnerships or bringing external experts. LSE Consulting provides opportunities to create and activate professional and academic networks of LSE experts.

Project timeline

- Academics have other commitments (teaching, marking, applying to grant funding, implementing research, engaging with the public, etc.).
- The following questions need to be considered when making the decision to bid and designing the project plan:
  - Can we deliver the required outputs in the deadlines indicated in the TOR?
  - Is the client flexible? Would they rearrange their timeline based on our needs?
  - Does the client need to meet any reporting requirements (to their funders, presenting findings to their stakeholders, etc.)?
- These questions can be clarified before submitting a proposal or at the beginning of a project. Clients usually inform when it is possible to modify the timeline.

Design and budget

- Overall project budget
  - Clients usually provide a maximum available budget. Budget and design tend to follow a top-down logic: *what can we do we what we have?*
  - In some cases the budget is not informed or it depends on what is offered. Here, budget and design tend to follow a bottom-up logic: *this is what we want to offer, how much do we need?*
  - You can rely on budgets used for previous similar projects or try to get more information from the client.
- Fees for individual researchers
  - Fees are expressed in terms of day rates.
  - Day rates vary according to the maximum budget available, level of experience, level of commitment to the project (responsibility and time), project duration, size of the team and other costs required.
  - We have reference fees and some researchers have their own minimum day rates.
- Other costs
  - The budget needs to factor in the costs of data collection; travel, accommodation and sustenance; incentives for participants; honoraria for supporting experts; printing of materials, etc.

Budgets and contracts

- Budgets and LSE Consulting:
  - Our team supports with budgeting based on the design that is being proposed.
  - LSE Consulting charges an overhead of 20% from the total project cost that is informed to the client.
  - Unless there is a different requirement, the overhead is embedded in the costs presented in the proposal.
- Budgets and contracting routes:
  - Researchers sign a contract with LSE Enterprise Ltd. They can be added to LSE's payroll or be paid as self-employed (invoicing) or have funding towards their research accounts.
  - Consultancy fees are an extra income → Payroll involves deducting oncosts: Employer's National Insurance (ENI), apprenticeship levy (~14.3%) and pension (if you have opted in).
  - How researchers are paid depends on their preference, as well as their location, affiliations, and nationality. Researchers based in the UK need to go through a Right-to-Work check.

Writing the proposal

- LSE Consulting can support the writing process. Someone from our team will prepare a template taking into account the instructions provided by the client. Usually, proposals are written collaboratively, and the sections are split as follows:

Proposal Section	**Who writes it?**
Overview of the organisation	LSE Consulting
Background section about the policy context and project objectives	Experts
Methods or approach	Experts
Team delivering and responsibilities	LSE Consulting prepares this section based on researchers' profiles and agreed responsibilities
Project timeline and specification of deliverables	LSE Consulting based on experts' input
Quality assurance and risk management	LSE Consulting based on experts' input
Budget and breakdown of staff days per task	LSE Consulting based on experts' input

Administrative requirements

- Besides the technical proposal, clients have a number of administrative requirements. LSE Consulting will:
  - Identify whether the team meets the requirements to be eligible to participate in bidding.
  - Gather and organise the necessary documents and forms necessary to complete the submission.
  - Submit the full proposal on behalf of the team of experts.
- If the proposal is successful, LSE Consulting will:
  - Review the project contract and negotiate with the client if needed (IP concerns, payment schedule, etc.)
  - Arrange contracts with researchers, partners and subcontractors.
  - Manage payments for project staff.

LSE Consulting

Project management

Implementing an opportunity

Life Cycle of a Project

- Successful proposal
- Client contracting and team contracting
- Kick off meeting
- Implementation
- Project closing

Support provided by LSE Consulting

- Administrative management (included in our overhead)
- Light Project Management (requires PM days)
- Full Project Management (requires PM days)

Available support: Administrative Management

- Sub-contracting
- Basic budget management (project set up)
- Invoicing
- Communication with the client (optional)

Available support: Light Project Management

- Administrative management
- Budget management
- Team coordination to meet deliverable deadlines
- Supporting deliverable submission (report formatting)
- Communication with the client

Full Project Management

- Administrative management
- Budget management
- Team coordination to meet deliverable deadlines
- Supporting deliverable submission (report formatting)
- Supporting deliverable submission (data collection tools, organising engagement activities)
- Communication with the client

Project management examples

- **Administrative management:** GIZ ‘Building Resilience in Syria; Assessing Fragilities and Strengthening Positive Coping Mechanisms’
- **Light project management:** World Bank ‘Understanding the Political Economy of Carbon Pricing’
- **Full project management:** European Commission DG Trade, Sustainability Impact Assessment of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement negotiations

Ethics and Norms

Key considerations

Research Ethics

- Consultancy projects are subject to the same rules as research at LSE. An ethics review is required for any study involving:
  - Human participants e.g., for interviews, online surveys, observations, social media;
  - User generated data (e.g., from discussion forums, social media platforms, vlogs or blogs, comments on posts or articles);
  - Use of datasets containing identifiable information (names, emails, social media profile names, etc., or any other information that could lead to the identification of an individual) – even if you plan to anonymise the data;
  - Research that might have negative repercussions for any individuals or groups.
  - You must obtain approval of your ethics review before you commence any data collection
- The Research Ethics Committee (REC) takes up to 4 weeks to review/approve submissions. This time needs to be factored in the project timeline and discussed with the client if necessary.

Read 'Research ethics review in a nutshell!' here.

Due diligence reviews

- Consultancy projects are subject to LSE's External Funding Acceptance Policy and the External Funding Acceptance Procedures.
- Part of LSE Consulting's administrative support mandate are determining whether a DDR is needed and conducting the review before finalising the contract signature.
- A DDR is required for projects funded by private sector clients with budgets above GBP 25,000.

Data Protection

- Consulting projects must follow LSE's Data Protection Policy.
- Clients ask for different types of evidence to demonstrate compliance with GDPR and an adequate processing of personal data. This usually happens at the bidding stage or at the contracting stage.
- LSE Consulting liaises with LSE's Data Protection Officer to ensure that we meet clients' requirements.
- LSE Consulting encourages research teams to use M365 SharePoint (compliant with safety requirements).

Consulting in practice

Experience of an academic :

Dr Marina Cino Pagliarello, Senior Research Associate, LSE Consulting

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Key points

- My experience with LSE Consultancy (since 2012)
- Benefits of academic consultancy
- Tips

My experience

- **Linked to former exp. in public policy analysis/edu**
- **Different contributions and roles (1 to 3 projects x year - time availability & project duration matter)**

- **Projects aligned with my research topic/policy interests** *(EU education; Higher Education nternationalization; Evaluation of public policies; Western Balkans)*
- **My "typical" project involves:**

- co-writing the proposal & looking for partners/team (*e.g. existing networks of colleagues/PhD students as research assistants, etc*)
- leading the team/research with the project manager
- +o- involvement in methodology & fieldwork (*e.g. desk research; interviews, focus groups*)
- Analysis of the data and co-writing the final report before the revision rounds (*e.g. feedback from the client*)
- Dissemination activities (*e.g. presentations, blogs, etc*)

Examples of past projects (education, VET, HE)

Research Study on "Mapping vocational education and training policies and practices for social inclusion and social cohesion in the Western Balkans, Turkey, and Israel" -ETF

Study on "Collection and review of skills mismatch policies and practices in the EU" – Cedefop

Policy Evaluation Study on "Teachers and Trainers in work-based learning: Mapping of Models and Practices" - European Commission/DG Employment - *senior expert/core team*.

Policy Evaluation of the "21st Century Schools Programme" in the Western Balkans - British Council - *senior expert/core team*

Opportunity in Higher Education in Northern Ireland - British Council, *project director*

Review of evidence of international students' experiences in UK universities - Office for Students/UK Gov – *project director*

Ongoing

Policy Evaluation of the "Monitoring, Evaluation Research and Learning of 'Learning 2 Code' in South Africa and Kenya" - British Council – *senior expert/core team*

Policy Evaluation through a longitudinal study of the British Council programme Alumni UK –*project director*

Benefits

Research and career development

- Complementing your own research with policy insights & real-world examples on your topic area
- Policy-led teaching (e.g. curriculum; assesments)
- Integrate CV with policy publications
- Evidence of academia-policy making/stakeholders engagement (e.g. academic posts; networking)
- Opportunity of impact for the REF
- Present yourself as a reputational expert to policy-makers
- Improving how you communicate research to policy makers and alternative audiences (e.g. infographics, video animations, etc.)

Other transversal benefits (depending on your role)

- Grant writing (I learnt a lot from lost and won bids!)

- Managing a project, supervising the quality of the deliverables, dealing with criticalities

- Teamworking, managing deadlines, diplomatic skills (e.g. liaising with the client)

- Communication skills (e.g. presenting to different audiences)

Tips

- **Choose projects that can help you to position yourself as an expert in the topic**
- **Be realistic on what you can deliver and by when /**some projects have a very short timeframe
- **Be flexible**

-Consultancy deadlines vs academic deadlines

-Working days vs working hours (similar to academic work)

-Work as part of a team sometimes means helping in other tasks

Useful links

Get in touch with LSE Consulting

- **Website:** https://www.lse.ac.uk/business/consulting
- **Email:** consulting@lse.ac.uk
- **Academic Consulting Portal:** https://www.lse.ac.uk/business/consulting/academic-consulting-portal
- **OppsLink:** https://opps-link.com/
- **Academic Speakers Bureau:** https://www.academicspeakersbureau.com/