

Blog title:

Levelling-Up with Live Projects in University Teaching

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Blog Text

Live projects can be an exciting way of giving students real-world work experience as part of their courses. A live brief is essentially a project that involves “real clients or users, in real-time settings” (Sara, 2006, p. 1) unlike the usual ‘mock-briefs’ that lack a genuine and immediate client need.

When students work on live briefs they gain valuable employability skills, including many of the core aspects of employability. Compared to use of case studies, simulations, authentic tasks or ‘mock briefs’; live briefs align students with industry using real life scenarios providing interaction and feedback from the businesses. Most importantly students can include this work in their portfolios and highlight the paid project work on their CVs. Time and time again my colleagues and I have frequently witnessed students leverage these opportunities into work placements and employment after graduation.

Live briefs are particularly well-suited to non-profits, small businesses, or government agencies. These types of organisations tend to have tighter budgets, so see the partnership with a University and students as both cost effective and socially beneficial, whilst also being able to be more flexible around the timeframes for integrating these briefs into our academic schedules .

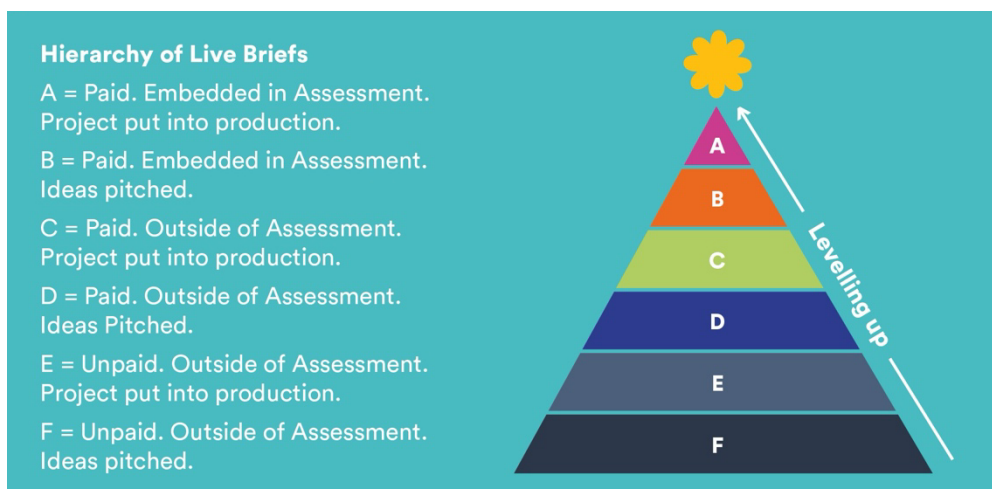
Live briefs can be integrated into the module assessment briefs, but we need to use caution when explicitly stating a particular module will contain live paid briefs, as they can be hard to secure. Instead, it is suggested that modules be designed in such a way the live briefs can be switched out with simulations or mock briefs depending on availability. In this way students could either delivering a pitch or they could collaboratively on a solving a problem and producing a report.

.Live briefs are often used in ways that inadvertently bias towards students without other commitments such as dependents or or part times jobs. I have been working on real live paid projects with students on the Creative Advertising degrees at Falmouth University for the past 10 years. Based on this experience of trial and error, I have learnt there are ways to present live brief opportunities through assessment that make it easier for students with dependents or who need to take on additional paid work to participate and not miss out.

It is crucial to recognise that less privileged students often work nearly full-time during evenings and weekends to support themselves financially while studying. Indeed, 55% of UK students now work an average of 13.5 hours a week (BBC, 2023). This means they have less availability to participate in extracurricular assignments or accept unpaid placements. The Social Mobility Commission has noted, “Unpaid internships are damaging for social mobility. It is time to consign them to history” (Milburn, 2017). From my perspective, I believe there are parallels to be drawn between the use of extracurricular ‘live briefs’ and unpaid internships, and so I would argue that the practice of unpaid extracurricular live briefs outside of formal scheduled class time or assessment is discouraged, as we need to ensure these projects help ‘levelling up’ the playing field in the UK.

Through my work in this area, I have managed to achieve what I would consider ‘the gold star’ for embedding ‘live brief’ opportunities into students’ assessment, with their work also being used by the employer and paid for. I have found that having them built into the curriculum results in equalising the opportunity for all students.

As Universities are facing growing pressure to demonstrate how their programs prepares students for employment, we must ensure these opportunities are inclusive and equitable. I have proposed this hierarchy as a guide for lecturers to consider how to best present such opportunities to students.



**Hierarchy of the use of Live Briefs in University Teaching.
Ranked based on perceived equity and employability status.**

Proposing a Hierarchy of the use of Live Briefs

Embedding live briefs into assessment, producing work for clients, and compensating students for their contributions present significant challenges as touched on above. However, incremental improvements in reducing the existing practice of utilising live briefs outside of formal assessment without remuneration should be sought. By referencing the live brief hierarchy, lecturers can deliberate these options and help move towards a shift in the culture and attitudes toward the use of live briefs among both university academic staff and

external organisations. This progressive adaptation will enhance the integration of live briefs into the curriculum, ultimately benefiting the student experience, learning, equity and employability.

Works Cited

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Author biography

Lucy Cokes is a senior lecturer at Falmouth University, School of Communications. She has been working in higher education for the past ten years and is a Fellow of Advance HE. She leads the Behaviour Change for Good modules on the Advertising courses and started the inhouse agency 'BE good' to manage the live projects which have included a number of government funded campaigns around VAWG and Healthy Relationships. Prior to this she ran a highly successful digital marketing agency with 80 staff in the UK across 3 offices.

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