

Elders Council project – student blog

By Jakub Slachta, team leader of a Business Clinic student-led project that offered consultancy advice to Elders Council

Our consultancy work for Elders Council proved to be our most extensive and rewarding project during our time at Northumbria University.

Along with my Business Clinic colleagues – Ben Inman, Jakub Vana and Yen Hoa Tranova – we worked on a project with Elders Council, a not-for-profit membership organisation for people aged 50 and over in Newcastle. Essentially, the organisation wants to promote a positive image of ageing and inspire and enable older people to be active and improve their quality of life.

We were asked to increase awareness of Elders Council in their bid to recruit new members – particularly from the 50-65 age target group – strengthen relationships with ethnic minority groups, and forge new contacts that could help it improve and expand its service offering.

Tackling such a broad-ranging brief was a challenge but one that we relished! We looked at strategies to increase membership among 50-65-year-olds, identified ways of building those relationships with ethnic minority groups, and devised a communications strategy to increase visibility of Elders Council. We also analysed the organisation's website, newsletter and magazine to see how they could be made more appealing to a broader audience.

We then produced a series of recommendations that would allow Elders Council to meet the original aims of the project. There are too many to mention here but some of our key suggestions included an overhaul of the organisation's marketing materials, ideas for increased collaboration with local organisations, new activities for members to try including a new book club, and paid-for and organic campaigns to increase engagement on social media.

We were also mindful of one of the key aspects of the brief – to increase diversity – so we proposed that Elders Council partner with local charities, religious organisations and community centres to share resources and provide support. Our other recommendations included a jobs board in the organisation's magazine and bulletin to encourage more people to offer volunteering services, and a crowdfunding campaign that could raise funds to improve Elders Council's services.

The project was different to anything I've ever worked on. My previous work experience has been in the private sector – I've worked as a financial analyst for a French start-up and sales intern for a Czech-based tech company – so working with Elders Council, whose main focus isn't to

make profit, was a completely new experience for me. It required a shift of mindset, which was difficult at first but became less of an issue as the project went on.

I also found it a little uncomfortable presenting marketing ideas to a group of people much older than me but Elders Council were great with us; we never felt that they saw our relative lack of experience as a negative.

In carrying out this work, our aim was to cement Elders' position as a forward-thinking organisation that generates tangible benefits for local people and communities. Hopefully our recommendations have given them food for thought.