Startup launchpad

Startup Launchpad is an intensive three-day, team-based innovation experience where students collaborate to develop early-stage startup concepts. Through rapid opportunity exploration, customer discovery, experimentation, and venture shaping, students learn to transform problems into viable entrepreneurial ideas. This intensive model encourages creative risk taking, evidence guided decision making, and cross-disciplinary teamwork, giving students a hands-on introduction to startup development in a safe, supportive, and fast paced environment.

Description	Over three days, students work in interdisciplinary teams to generate, test, and refine a startup idea. Guided by facilitators, teams explore problem spaces, identify potential users, ideate solutions, build minimal viable concepts, and validate assumptions through rapid testing. The sprint culminates in a pitch or prototype demonstration, capturing the core value proposition and next steps for development. This structure mimics early-stage startup acceleration in a compressed, experiential format.
Learning outcomes	Students will be able to: 1. Identify and analyse meaningful problems and entrepreneurial opportunities. 2. Apply customer discovery and validation techniques to refine ideas. 3. Develop and iterate on an early-stage venture concept using lean experimentation. 4. Collaborate effectively in interdisciplinary teams under time constraints. 5. Pitch a coherent, evidence informed startup concept.
How it works	**Day 1: Problem Exploration & Opportunity Discovery** ***Morning: Icebreaker + Team Formation*** • Quick innovation warm-up (e.g., “Worst Idea Wins”) to build rapport. • Teams form based on interest areas: sustainability, health, digital apps, creative industries, or social impact. ***Midday: Problem Framing Workshop*** • Teams brainstorm and cluster problem spaces. • Tools: problem trees, stakeholder mapping, opportunity matrix. • Each team selects one problem worth solving. ***Afternoon: Customer Discovery (Rapid)*** • Teams create proto-personas.

	• Develop “assumption maps” about user needs, behaviours, and pain points.
	• Conduct quick research (desk research, interviews if feasible, peer testing).
	Output:
	• Clear problem statement
	• User personas
	• Key assumptions to test on Day 2
	
	Day 2: Ideation, Validation & Concept Development
	Morning: Ideation Sprint
	• Structured ideation (brainwriting, SCAMPER, Crazy 8s)..
	• Teams select 1–2 promising ideas based on desirability, feasibility, and novelty.
	Midday: Lean Testing
	• Teams design simple experiments to test assumptions:
	  ○ landing page mock-ups
	  ○ surveys
	  ○ sketches
	  ○ value proposition tests
	  ○ quick interviews
	• Validate or invalidate assumptions.
	Afternoon: Value Proposition & Model Building
	• Develop a rough Value Proposition Canvas or Lean Canvas.
	• Identify:
	  ○ target customer
	  ○ core problem
	  ○ solution concept
	  ○ competitive alternatives
	  ○ early revenue/impact model
	  ○ key risks
	Output:
	• Validated idea direction
	• Initial Lean Canvas or equivalent
	
	Day 3 – Prototyping, Refinement & Pitching
	Morning: Prototype Build
	• Create a low-fidelity prototype (depending on concept):
	  ○ storyboard
	  ○ clickable wireframe
	  ○ physical model
	  ○ service blueprint

	◦ demo script or role-play ***Midday: Testing & Iteration*** • Peer testing across teams using structured feedback: *I like… I wish… What if…?* • Refine prototype and venture model based on insights. ***Afternoon: Pitch Preparation & Showcase*** • Teams craft a 3 to 5 minute pitch including: ◦ problem ◦ user insight ◦ solution ◦ evidence from testing ◦ value proposition ◦ next steps • Panel presentation (academic staff, mentors, or partner organisations). ***Output:*** • Early-stage startup concept + supporting prototype • Final pitch deck or demo
Resources required	• Teamwork space with flexible seating • Prototyping materials (paper, markers, cardboard, post-its) • Digital tools (Padlet, Teams) • Opportunity/problem prompts (optional) • Access to stakeholders or user proxies (where feasible)
AI considerations	AI tools may support: • generating problem statements or user personas • exploring industry trends • producing lightweight sketches or mock-ups • identifying risks or competitive alternatives • drafting early pitch outlines Students must still: • critically evaluate AI suggestions • ensure originality in reasoning • justify decisions with evidence from real testing For assessed tasks, students should declare how AI was used.
Assessment	**Formative** • Problem statement submission • Assumption map + testing plan

	• Prototype review • Daily stand-up reflections **Summative** • Final pitch (live or recorded) • Lean Canvas + prototype submission • Individual reflection on team roles, learning, and innovation capability • Short venture summary or “next steps” plan