



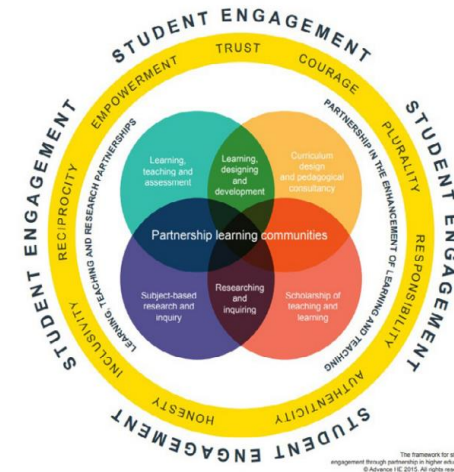
University Living Lab: Addressing social and environmental challenges through existing assessment

Tanya Lewis, Grace-Ann Ababio, Jen O'Brien

Living Lab?



Figure 1. The framework for student engagement through partnership in higher education (Advance HE, 2019)



The framework for student engagement through partnerships in higher education © Advance HE 2015. All rights reserved.

University focused

A **university or college Living Lab** is a means to address real-world **institutional problems** [real-world sustainability challenges] using a dynamic **partnerships** between all the institution's stakeholder groups. It facilitates **collaborations** that liberate intellectual potential and **address practical challenges**. Surprisingly, a Lab does not necessarily demand significant additional resources, it simply helps identify existing ones and redirects them to the right areas. (EAUC – Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges Living Lab Community of Practice)



Universitylivinglab.org

Our University Living Lab links applied research between organisations and our students to affect change.

Organisations need research. Students need to do assessment.

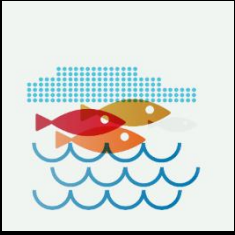
Why not do something useful? (O'Brien *et al.*, 2021)

A wide-angle photograph of a busy university campus. In the background, a large, ornate stone building with a prominent tower and blue roof is visible. The foreground is filled with a large crowd of students walking along a wide, paved path. Lush green trees line the path, and the overall atmosphere is one of a vibrant academic environment.

46,000 students

=

7.5 million hours of research time



1. Organisation sets the research that they need to affect change for sustainable development. Framed around SDGs

SDGs



Text search



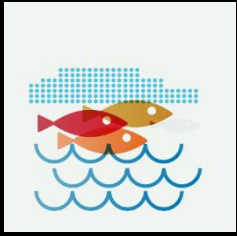
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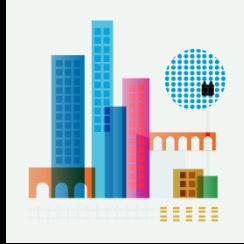
SDGs	Project name	Project description	Organisation	Download
4, 5, 10	Challenges for Educational Participation in Rural Uganda	This project should aim to identify and explore the challenges facing rural education in Uganda.	St. Veronica Charity Organisation	Click here
11,9,10	App development for wayfinding	How might technology be utilised to promote accessible pedestrian routes on the Oxford Road corridor?	Corridor Manchester	Click here
13, 3, 11	University parking overflow in residential areas	How to mitigate the problem of University staff members parking in surrounding residential areas	Carbon Action Group, University of Manchester	Click here
11,12,17	Analysing the success of Libraries of Things	Explore existing LoT models to identify effective ways to achieve sustained community engagement.	Manchester Library of Things	Click here
1,4,9	How vocational training in Zambia contributes towards breaking the cycle of poverty and improving social mobility.	This project asks for insight into how vocational training in Zambia contributes towards breaking the cycle of poverty and improving social mobility to support impact framing and funding applications	Zambia Orphans Aid UK	Click here
1,4,9	Do gender and disability affect the experience of Zambian vocational students and graduates	ZOA have invested in vocational training for orphans in Zambia for 10 years. This project asks for the specific focus of how gender and disability affect the experience of Zambian vocational students and graduates	Zambia Orphans Aid UK	Click here
1,4,9	Employability of Zambian graduates with vocational qualifications	ZOA have invested in vocational training for orphans in Zambia for 10 years. This project asks for a literature review on whether vocational graduates in Zambia are able to access jobs and earn an income when they graduate than their peers (those who study non-vocational subjects at tertiary level).	Zambia Orphans Aid UK	Click here
1,4,9	Return on investment of vocational training	ZOA have invested in vocational training for orphans in Zambia for 10 years. This project would identify the return on investment of funding the training of a teacher or healthcare worker in Zambia. For example, you may wish to consider financial and social returns. Please include accessible and engaging visual materials in your work.	Zambia Orphans Aid UK	Click here
3 5 10	Improving Access to Women's Health Services in Restricted	Explore and evaluate approaches towards enabling safe access to	Population Services International	Click here

Database of projects.

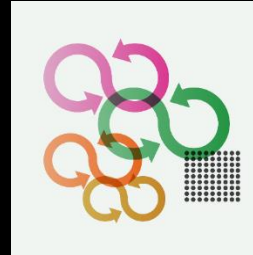
- Can be 'dropped in' as assessment within a Unit.
- Can be inspiration for dissertations, coursework and so forth – we will close the feedback loop.



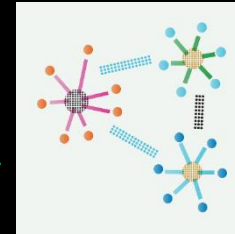
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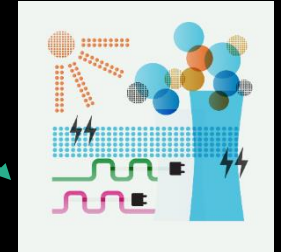
2.
Students
chose the
research and
adapt from
disciplinary
perspective
for their
degree



3.
Students
undertake
the research
which is
marked by
their course
leader



4.
We return
the research
report to the
organisation



5.
The organisation
shares **impact**
of the research
which we return
to the student

“Just wanted to share a very cool little win on the back of your report.

We've commissioned 2 ground Bubble Beehives for our new development.... I've attached some illustrations for our developers”





Connects professional and academic experience

Breaks down faculty silos

Demonstrates employability

My Experience As A Living Lab Champion

Walked, not talked.

Eight months advancing sustainability through the University of Manchester Living Lab.

Grace-Ann Ababio



Love at first sight

Real students. Real organisations.
Real problems solved through coursework.

And built around the very SDGs I care most about.

“It almost felt too good to be true.”



Our team at the 'air we breathe' stand

“

If sustainability were walked instead of talked, more people would be able to relate to it.

Imagine knowing, as a student, that your coursework will create real change in society. That is how sustainability is advanced.

Eight months as a Champion

Hands-on initiatives across the city, engaging the public of every age and raising awareness about the air we breathe.



Hands-on with young scientists



Families at the air we breathe stand



Living Lab Champions at an event

No two events are ever the same

You'd think that after nearly a year I'd be an expert by now. I'm not, and that's the gift. Each time, I learn something new from the lovely Mancunians I meet.

One constant: their genuine wish to do better by the environment and the air we all breathe.



Manchester Victoria station

Committing to change

The Living Lab has brought new friends into my life. Recently, students shared their solutions with the university and the wider public and I couldn't help but notice how proud they were of what they'd made.

“Consciously or not, they were committing to the change our society needs.”



WHAT COMES NEXT

My Manchester story simply cannot be told without the University Living Lab.

And now, I've begun to imagine how I might carry it home — **to Ghana.**



Grace-Ann Ababio · University Living Lab Champion





Student feedback:

“I am a research intern and I think that without the research skills I gained during the project **I wouldn't have been able to get this position.**”

Student feedback:

“The assessment style is the best I have had yet, it challenges 21st century challenges with the learning, and lets you interact with these challenges alongside a business - **learning feels useful when it is put into real-world contexts**”

Student feedback:

*“I valued the value they place on us.....This course felt different, it tackles immediate problems to the world and the coordinators have set up this unit to **make our voices feel important and valued.**”*



Manchester Community Central
Supporting our voluntary and community sector

Home	Support for groups	Spirit of Manchester	Policy, influence and collaboration	News, events, training and jobs	Volunteer Centre Manchester
Manchester's community stories	Cost of living crisis	Emergency response: Afghanistan, Pakistan and Ukraine			

[Home](#) • [Tackling Period Poverty in Greater Manchester – Public consultation questionnaire](#)

Tackling Period Poverty in Greater Manchester – Public consultation questionnaire

6 Mar 2020 - 11:39 by michelle foster

This project is run alongside Manchester City Council, by two 3rd year Geography students as part of the 'Governing Urban Transformations' module at the University of Manchester. The project is looking at generating a strategy and report for tackling period poverty in Greater Manchester, which has some really exciting opportunities to be taken seriously by officials, with some of the policy recommendations potentially being implemented within the city.

As part of the report, they are collecting primary research through a public consultation questionnaire on people's lived experiences and understanding of period poverty. The survey is open for everyone (including men), and to create the most robust policy suggestions, they would like as many responses as possible. The survey should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete and will be open until Monday 16 March.

Complete the survey [here](#)

News Type:
[Sector News](#)



Student feedback: “The idea that we can directly influence University policy is amazing.”

Student feedback: “I have never considered myself as a **change maker** for sustainability before”

“helped to shift how we see the University as a partner, enabling us to work far more closely together to benefit from their expertise and capacity. I have seen value and impacts that will encourage me to continue to look for further collaboration opportunities with the University”.

Manchester City Council



www.universitylivinglab.org



Conclusion

- Interdisciplinary needs and opportunities of sustainability;
- Collaborative nature of sustainability for all involved including partners;
- Employability opportunities – directly and indirectly;
- Civic responsibility – opportunity for our students to ‘do good’;
- Open source;
- Great PEL experience for students.

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