

# BROKERING APPLIED RESEARCH BETWEEN STUDENTS AND ORGANISATIONS TO AFFECT CHANGE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**The University of Manchester Living Lab brokers applied research projects between students and external organisations to affect change for sustainable development<sup>1</sup>. The research projects are framed around the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and many of them address SDG13 on Climate Action.**

University of Manchester's Living Lab research projects are broad enough to be tailored to any assessment, at any level, for any discipline. Sharing the research projects and the students' research on our online platform maximises the reach and impact of their work, whilst reducing the high administrative burden often associated with Living Lab for teaching.

The motivation for this work was recognising that at the University of Manchester alone, there are 40,000 students who all need to undertake assessment. The Living Lab deploys student research power to meet existing assessment and sustainability needs; these research projects are not supervised projects or placements. Using the online platform, the University Living Lab

can be embedded into teaching with the same resources as for any course assessment.

The platform currently has around 150 projects set by organisations across the world, who need insight to develop their sustainability work, which are shared with students through our online platform. Students can tailor these projects to any assessment, or academics can offer the model as the assessment on a taught course. The platform shares students' completed research with the organisation that set it, whilst enhancing the students' profile and creating an open source of knowledge. The organisation uses the students' research to enhance their sustainability work. The organisation shares any impact of the students' research with us, and we feed that back to the student.

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **The University of Manchester Living Lab** brokers applied research between students and organisations who need such research to affect change for sustainability and climate action.
- **University of Manchester has invested significant resources** in developing an online platform for brokering and sharing student projects with external organisations, which reduces the administrative burden often associated with Living Labs for teaching.
- **University of Manchester are actively seeking** to grow the model of Living Lab, extending their partnership to work other HEIs to engage their students in projects, and with more external organisations to offer projects.



**“At the University of Manchester alone, there are 7.5 million hours of resource annually that could be directed towards solving climate change challenges through compulsory assessment. Scaled up, globally, that could be 49 billion hours of student time by 2050 that could be invested into solving climate challenges.”**

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The University Living Lab was established as the first of its kind in 2013. Since then, approximately 1000 students have worked with around 50 partner organisations, including international consultants, governments, health bodies, charities and local businesses, many of whom have worked with the University year on year to draw on the benefits of student research power.

Impacts range from student consultation on Manchester City Councils Carbon Zero 2038 policy, to work on urban resilience that was presented to the Rockefeller Foundation in New York. At least two students have been employed by the organisations they did their research for and many others have attributed their employment to the opportunity.

Students love the Living Lab assessment style, with one saying:

“The assessment style is the best I have had yet, it challenges 21st century challenges with the learning... learning feels useful when it is put into real-world contexts”. The opportunity for students to use their skills, learning and ideas to enact change is not only advantageous for the partners and communities involved, but is a chance for students to be a powerful force for social change.

## KEY FACTS ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

<b>Institution name</b>	University of Manchester
<b>Location</b>	Manchester, UK
<b>Number of students (total for institution)</b>	40,000
<b>Number of staff (total for institution)</b>	10,000
<b>Campus type</b>	City Centre

## KEY FACTS ABOUT THE CASE STUDY

<b>University or department led:</b>	Initially department led, now University wide.
<b>Number of staff engaged:</b>	Seven
<b>Number of students engaged:</b>	~1000
<b>Credit-bearing:</b>	It can be, and has been used as a credit bearing stand-alone assessment (i.e. where students have been told to go to the Living Lab and undertake a piece of research as part of a course). The projects have also been used as a source of inspiration for dissertations, essays etc.
<b>Mandatory or optional:</b>	Both
<b>External partners:</b>	More than 50 external partners, including Manchester City Council, Climate Change Agency, Friends of the Earth, ARUP.
<b>Engagement approach used:</b>	Each research project is different; some are desk based using secondary, or collecting primary, data, some are field based and include empirical data collection, including with specialist kit. These projects can be undertaken in pairs or groups, or individually.

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## HOW TO CITE THIS PAPER

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<sup>1</sup>Evans, J., Jones, R., Karvonen, A., Millard, L & Wendler, J 2015, 'Living labs and co-production: university campuses as platforms for sustainability science', *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, vol. 16, pp. 1-6.  
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