



Living Lab project brief – **Social Impact and Community**

Key SRS contact for this project (name, role, email)

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Academic supervisor, if known (can be assigned by student researcher's school if not)

To be assigned by school

Description of the paper

This paper provides a brief overview of a potential project that could usefully inform the SRS Department's work.

This paper is in essence a template for a potential **dissertation** Living Lab project that a member of staff would like to propose. The question and research is intended to inform and/or make recommendations to the SRS Department's work areas. It should also align with one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals (see below for more context).

The Vision for Change:

Large organisations like the University need to develop an approach for measuring their social impact that has a sound conceptual underpinning. This will enable better understanding of the University's social impact and will also inform future decision-making about the University's activities. The latter will include the design of the University's 2025-30 Community Plan.

Draft research question

Is it possible for the University of Edinburgh to determine whether it is having good social impact?

Background

The intention is that this project will work towards SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities and, within this:

- 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.
- 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.
- 10.4: Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality.

The University of Edinburgh makes a strategic commitment in Strategy 2030 to do the following by 2030:

- "Preparing students, graduates and alumni to make a difference in whatever they do"
- "Be leading Scotland's commitment to widening participation"

- “See our research having a greater impact as a result of partnership”
- “[Ensure] all of our staff and students will develop here, whether they are from Leith, Lisbon, Lahore or Lilongwe.”
- “Created opportunities for partners, friends, neighbours and supporters”
- “See integrated reporting of our whole organisational impact against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals”
- “Our estate will be [...] accessible. We will support [...] collaboration with our neighbours”

All of these have potential to create positive social impact.

Strategy 2030 is a [values-based strategy](#) and these values, from a brand perspective, have been distilled down to these keywords: “Ambitious; Relevant; Excellent; Inclusive; Accessible; Principled”.

How Strategy 2030 will be delivered is outlined in more detail, from a social impact perspective, in the University’s current [Community Plan](#), [Social and Civic Responsibility Delivery Plan](#), new [Widening Participation Strategy](#), [Corporate Parenting Plan](#) and other plans and strategies.

The University’s approach to measuring its overall social impact is currently developing. Reporting against the implementation of existing plans and strategies arguably does not tell the whole story just yet with respect to the University’s social impact. In particular, the possible negative social impacts of the University’s work are not currently factored into evaluation and adopting an approach which does this could represent a big cultural shift for the University.

Values-based frameworks for measuring social impact have been used in other sectors, e.g., public policy, and may be a suitable candidate to explore given that University already has a values-based strategy and is a public sector organisation.

Ethics-based frameworks are a sub-set of values-based frameworks (Boston et al., 2010; Wolff, 2019). Ethical values can be used to assess the outcomes of strategic decisions and ethical principles can offer a framework for deciding strategic action in instances where the impacts of decisions may not be felt for a long time or may be hard to measure; the former is a common issue for large organisations (and already acknowledged around research impact) and measurability is a common challenge for social impact measurement.

Work is needed to see if any of the University’s current values could be defined as ethical values and, if so, whether it is better to use them to try and evaluate outcomes and/or use them as principles to guide decisions. If the University’s current values could not be defined as ethical values, then alternative ideas on solutions would be welcome.

Data that already exists includes:

- access to the various plans and strategies produced by the University
- access to current annual reporting data and methodology for the University’s Community Plan
- information about the process to develop the University’s new Community Plan.

We don’t expect the student to find new data; rather, we hope they will research and apply models proposed in current academic research on ethical values and public policy to our existing data.

References

- Boston, Jonathan, Andrew Bradstock and David Eng. 2010. *Public Policy: Why ethics matters*. ANU Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt24h2rv>
- Wolff, Jonathan. 2019. *Ethics and Public Policy: A Philosophical Inquiry*. Routledge.

Objectives

Include 3-5 objectives. Examples are provided, these can be edited partly or completely

- Identify a standard definition and criteria for an ethical value.
- Identify current University of Edinburgh values in Strategy 2030 that are ethical values.
- Assess and compare the suitability of evaluating outcomes using ethical values, against using ethical values as principles to guide decisions, to determine the University's social impact.
- Make recommendations to the University alternative options for determining social impact.

Data set provision

Data needed for this project (delete as appropriate)	Data sets available from and contact information (delete as appropriate)
Annual Report and Accounts	https://www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability/programmes-and-projects/student-leadership-for-sustainability/living-lab-projects/sdg-data-library
Social and Civic Responsibility Annual Reports	https://www.ed.ac.uk/sustainability/programmes-and-projects/student-leadership-for-sustainability/living-lab-projects/sdg-data-library
Community Plan annual internal reports and raw survey and interview data	sarah.anderson@ed.ac.uk
University 2023 Economic Impact report	https://www.ed.ac.uk/c/economic-social-impact
Current thinking on form of 2025-30 Community Plan	sarah.anderson@ed.ac.uk
Internal social impact ecosystem mapping (summer 2023)	sarah.anderson@ed.ac.uk
Widening Participation impact report	https://www.ed.ac.uk/student-recruitment/widening-participation/wp-strategy-2030/wp-impact-report

Outputs


















*The project write up or dissertation will be a researchers own piece of research. They will decide what they think the results show and draw their own conclusions. An additional **secondary output** is required of all SRS living lab projects. This output will be shared with colleagues within and out with SRS, so that we can try to make operations changes based on the researchers recommendations.*

Output format	Insert not applicable or Yes (with further detail)
Presentation to a number of stakeholders	Yes – Community Team meeting and/or SRS all staff meeting
Mixed media resource for reuse	
Report with operational recommendations	Yes – report to be used by the Community Team , Head of Social Impact and Community Board
Resources for staff/student behaviour change	
Resources for staff/student training	
Other, please specify	

Transformational change with the SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals showcase 17 things humanity must do to ensure peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

The information in this table was obtained with permission from the UN sustainable goals website, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

The Sustainable Development Goals for 2030		Yes (x), sub-SDG (s)	The Sustainable Development Goals for 2030		Yes(x), sub-SDG (s)
	Economic growth must be inclusive to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality.			The food and agriculture sector offers key solutions for development, and is central for hunger and poverty eradication.	
	Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages is essential to sustainable development.			Obtaining a quality education is the foundation of improving people's lives and sustainable development.	
	Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.			Clean, accessible water for all is an essential part of the world we want to live in.	
	Energy is central to nearly every major challenge and opportunity.			Sustainable economic growth will require societies to create the conditions that allow people to have quality jobs.	
	Investments in infrastructure are crucial to achieving sustainable development.			To reduce inequalities, policies should be universal in principle paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised populations.	X, 10.2, 10.3, 10.4
	There needs to be a future in which cities provide opportunities for all, with access to basic services, energy, housing, transport & more.			It's about doing more and better with less and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation.	
	Climate change is a global challenge that affects everyone, everywhere.			Careful management of this essential global resource is a key feature of a sustainable future.	
	Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss.			Access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels.	
	Revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.				

The Social and Civic Responsibility Delivery Plan.

The SRS department delivers upon the social and civic responsibility aspect of Strategy 2030. To deliver Social and Civic Responsibility at the University of Edinburgh, we have chosen three strategic objectives and one cross-cutting theme outlined in the table below.

Strategy 2030 can be found here:

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/strategy-2030>

The Social and Civic Responsibility Delivery Plan can be found here:

https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/social_and_civic_responsibility_delivery_plan_2020.pdf

Social and Civic Responsibility Delivery Plan – Objectives and one cross-cutting theme	Briefly describe the project’s link to the objectives, how it is relevant and how this project works towards those objectives.
We will become a zero carbon and zero waste university - Increasing opportunities and raising aspirations by making education and employment an achievable goal for more people in Scotland and globally.	
We will widen participation in higher education and support inclusion - Increasing opportunities and raising aspirations by making education and employment an achievable goal for more people in Scotland and globally.	Widening participation is one way in which the University creates positive social impact (or not).
We will work together with local communities - to contribute to improve the lives of people across the Edinburgh City Region and beyond.	This project will inform the development of the University’s 2025-30 Community Plan.
Cross cutting theme: In our operations, research and teaching we will engage critically with, and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals - including the promotion, protection and respect for human rights.	

Students interested in taking part in this project should email the SRS Project Coordinator for Living Labs and the Sustainable Development Goals lpatters@ed.ac.uk. Include your program of study, dissertation timeframe, and a short summary of why you want to take part in the project.