

Finalist's case study

University of Cambridge Research and Development Living Laboratory for Sustainability

Section 1 About the project

Summary

The Living Laboratory for Sustainability's goal is to improve the sustainability of the University by using the estate to test and research environmental problems while improving the educational experience of students. The Living Lab seeks to involve students from diverse academic backgrounds to create dynamic solutions to the environmental sustainability challenges the University faces. It also looks to be a platform for academic and estate staff to suggest and steer research on the University estate, and to be a tool for Estate Management to improve the environmental practices of the University.

Project partners

Santander funds the Living Laboratory for Sustainability which is run out of the University's Environment and Energy Section.

Section 2 The results

The problem

The University of Cambridge is committed to reducing its environmental impact and the Living Lab is one of the channels which the Environment and Energy Section uses to engage with staff and students around sustainability issues and address potential solutions.

The approach

Through the Living Lab, students and staff use the estate as a practical resource or test bed to research real-world sustainability issues. It not only provides an opportunity for students and staff to research ways to reduce environmental impacts, but an opportunity for staff and students to better engage with their university.

The objectives of the Living Lab are to:

- Improve the sustainability of the University by using the estate to test and research real world environmental problems.
- Support students in developing knowledge and skills and gaining experience in sustainability projects.
- Promote interdisciplinary teamwork by enabling students from different disciplines to work together on sustainability projects and share their perspectives in seminars or informal collaborative discussions.



Profile

- HE - University of Cambridge
- >18,000 students
- 10,000 staff
- Urban – Cambridge

Category supported by



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- Ensure that the learning from the projects directly influences University operations.

The Living Lab achieves its aims through developing projects that connect students, academic and Estate Management staff. This collaboration leads to innovative research and practical projects that enhance the sustainability of the University.

Our goals

The Living Laboratory for Sustainability's goal is to improve the sustainability of the University by using the estate to test and research real world environmental problems while improving the educational experience of students attending the University.

Obstacles and solutions

<p>Organization and structure</p>	<p>One challenge that the Living Lab faced was in developing the specific nature of the programme, and its method of operation within the University structure. The Living Lab Advisory Group was essential in helping to shape the programme to fit the needs of the University. The group provided guidance and expert advice that led to the current structure of the programme.</p>
<p>Difficulty feeding results back into the University</p>	<p>Another challenge in developing the Living Lab was making sure that the results from research projects fed back into the University. Bringing key staff members onboard to be closely involved from the onset of projects has mitigated this difficulty.</p>

Performance and results

For the past two years, the Living Lab has connected staff, academics and students and engaged them in sustainability projects together. It engages and increases the awareness of sustainability for the involved University members as well as highlights areas for improvement at the University.

The University has and will continue to benefit from the research coming out of the Living Lab, which helps to highlight the environmental issues that it needs to address, as well as potential solutions. The University also benefits by tapping into the resources offered by its brightest minds, and harnessing the energy of students, staff and academics keen to help solve the environmental problems encountered on the estate.

The University is reviewing its Environmental Policy; the Living Lab is central to the academic element of the new draft policy and will help embed sustainability into teaching and research. It also sits within one of the University's core values: 'Concern for sustainability and the relationship with the environment'.

The Living Lab has received three more years of funding from Santander to continue growing and progressing. This is an indicator of the success of the first two years of the programme.

Section 3 The future

Lessons learned

Over the past two years the Living Lab has grown and adapted to the University and some of the lessons that have been learned are included below:

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- Provide students with real world hands on experience coupled with the existing education at the University to better prepare them for their future careers. Allow them to steer their own research and have more influence.
- Empower staff and students to feel they have a platform to implement and feed into sustainability at the University. Members of the University feel that they have more ownership of their space at the University.
- Develop innovative projects to connect multidisciplinary students and staff around sustainability.
- Communicate the results of successful projects and research through web content and dissemination materials and events. Hold annual events to showcase the projects and progress of the University and the Living Lab.

Sharing our project

The Living Lab actively disseminates across the sector both nationally and internationally. The programme has been created in a way in which other universities and organisations can adapt the core principles and ideology and apply them to their own institutions. The Living Lab has shared best practice and its experience with universities across the UK. The Living Lab Coordinator, Claire Hopkins, spoke at the 2014 EAUC Annual Conference, sharing best practice with the sector. Ms Hopkins has also met with delegates from other organisations looking to develop similar programmes. Regarding international dissemination, Ms Hopkins has video-conferenced to share our experience with organisations around the world, including universities in Chile, Shanghai and New Zealand. The Living Lab has also been included as a case study in a publication detailing best practice for sustainability in higher education institutions produced by the International Alliance of Research Universities called the IARU Green Guide. In addition to sharing our experience of how to run a living lab, we will continue to share successful outcomes of projects that have positively benefited our institution. For example, outcomes of the collaborative projects with Cambridge Retrofit are being shared with the wider Cambridge Retrofit community, which includes local businesses, SMEs, other education providers and the local councils.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

The University of Cambridge being nominated for a Green Gown award is recognition of excellence in the sector and highlights the positive steps that the University has taken. Recognition such as this encourages more activity and awareness around sustainability from staff and students in Cambridge and helps push forward necessary changes.

Further information

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