

LIVING LABS AND POSITIVE RESEARCH CULTURE



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A 'Cynnal | Ignite' project



WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?



Living lab networks

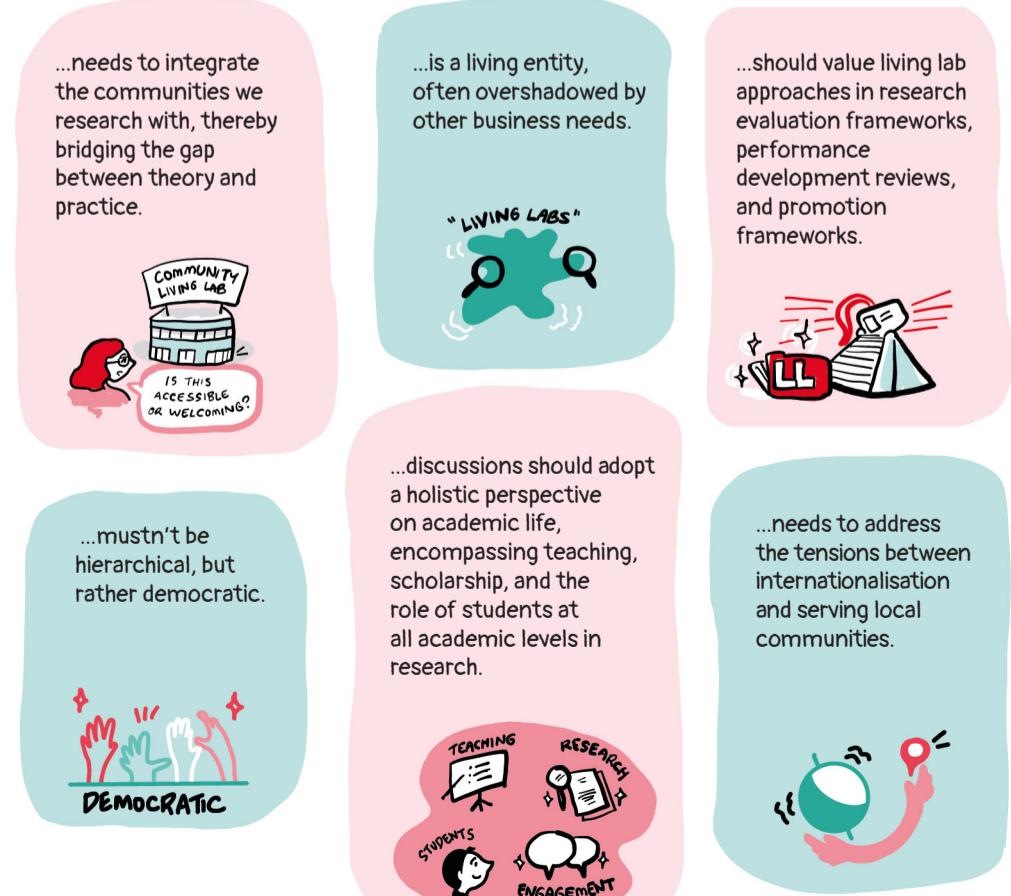
We are academics from the Welsh School of Architecture and the School of Geography and Planning. We aim to explore how living labs can be used to foster a positive research culture within our departments, institutes, research centres, and the wider university.

Cardiff University's strategy outlines living lab as an approach to co-define challenges and find solutions together. The 'living lab' is not a new concept – it is understood differently across contexts and disciplines. The living lab approach is already well-established in teaching and civic engagement across Cardiff University. However, the approach has not yet been fully embedded within the research environment or the wider research culture.

We invited colleagues to join us in a series of three exploratory workshops held between June and September 2025. The first two workshops, participated by 18 colleagues, explored experiences of adopting the living lab approach within and beyond the university, the barriers encountered or anticipated, and potential ways forward. The final workshop, involving 11 senior leaders across various levels, focused on developing a set of recommendations for implementation at different levels of the university.

This flyer summarises the key findings from the workshops, outlining what the living lab approach means for Cardiff University, how colleagues perceive research culture, the barriers and enablers to embedding living labs within research culture, and a set of recommendations for future action.

CARDIFF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CULTURE...



WHAT 'LIVING LAB' MEANS FOR US?

Based on what we heard from colleagues across Cardiff University in our workshops, we define living lab as:

A living lab is a collaborative, participatory, interdisciplinary and ever-evolving way of working that brings together multiple stakeholders — such as students, researchers, professional staff, policymakers, and local communities — in a real-world, place-based context. A living lab is a space for innovation, creation and systematic experimentation.

A living lab is not a short-term project with a fixed end-goal, but a long-term, ongoing process of co-defining problems and co-producing solutions through sustained relationships.

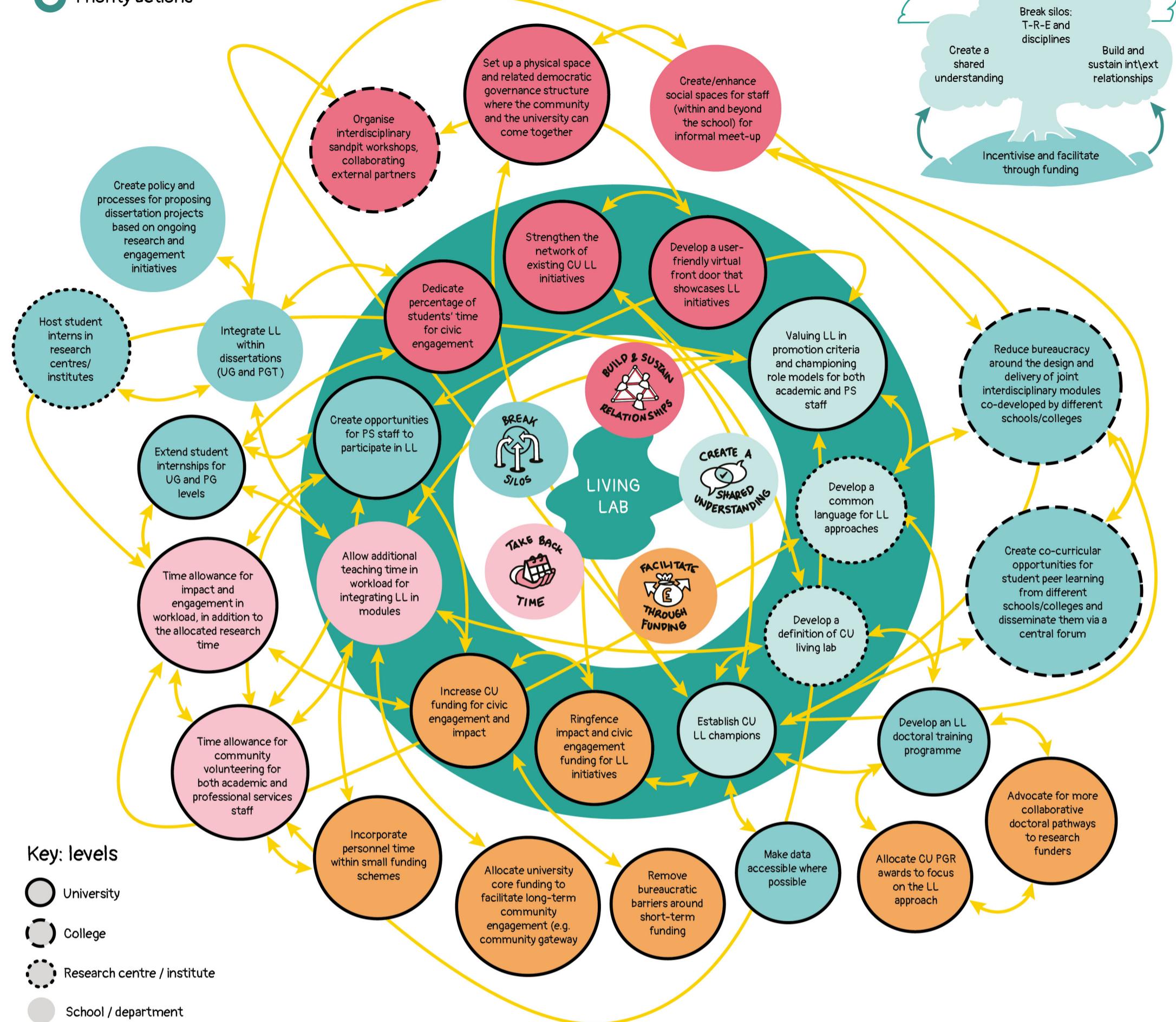


We drew on a systemic design approach to map networks of problems, actors, and levers for change. This visual approach facilitated collective sense-making and sense-sharing, and explored design for/as change.



ACTION PLAN

Priority actions



DRIVERS AND BARRIERS FOR EMBEDDING LIVING LABS IN CARDIFF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CULTURE

