

A holistic approach to embedding social responsibility and sustainability in a university – fostering collaboration between researchers, students and operations.

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Social Responsibility
and Sustainability

Universities and SDGs

- Universities, with their dual roles of furthering scientific knowledge, and providing high quality education to students, are well placed to contribute to sustainable development.
- They are also often significant organisations in their own right, providing further opportunities to influence policy, corporate behaviour and market development through the way they operate their estate, buy goods and services and make investments.



Social Responsibility and Sustainability (SRS) themes at the University of Edinburgh



Climate change



Sustainable estates



Sustainable procurement,
fair trade and supply
chains



Responsible
investment



SRS in learning
and teaching



Fair employer and
equality and diversity
issues



Widening
participation



Community
engagement



Public
engagement



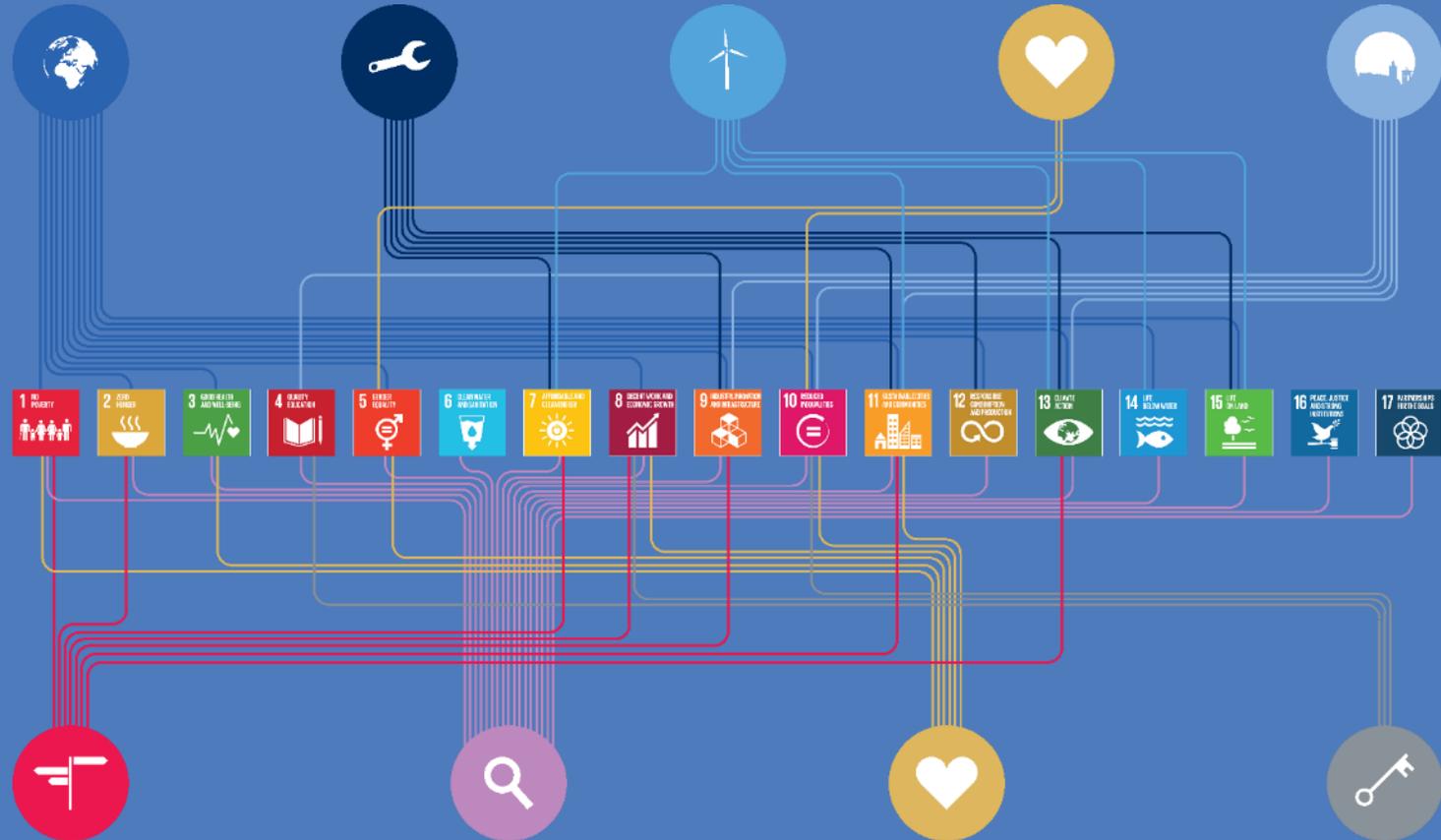
Sustainable procurement, fair trade and supply chains

Sustainable estates

Climate change

Equality and diversity

Community and public engagement



Responsible investment

SRS in research, learning and teaching

Fair employer

Widening participation

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Good health and well-being
4. Quality education
5. Gender equality
6. Clean water and sanitation
7. Affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and economic growth
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduced inequalities
11. Sustainable cities and communities
12. Responsible consumption and production
13. Climate action
14. Life below water
15. Life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships for the goals



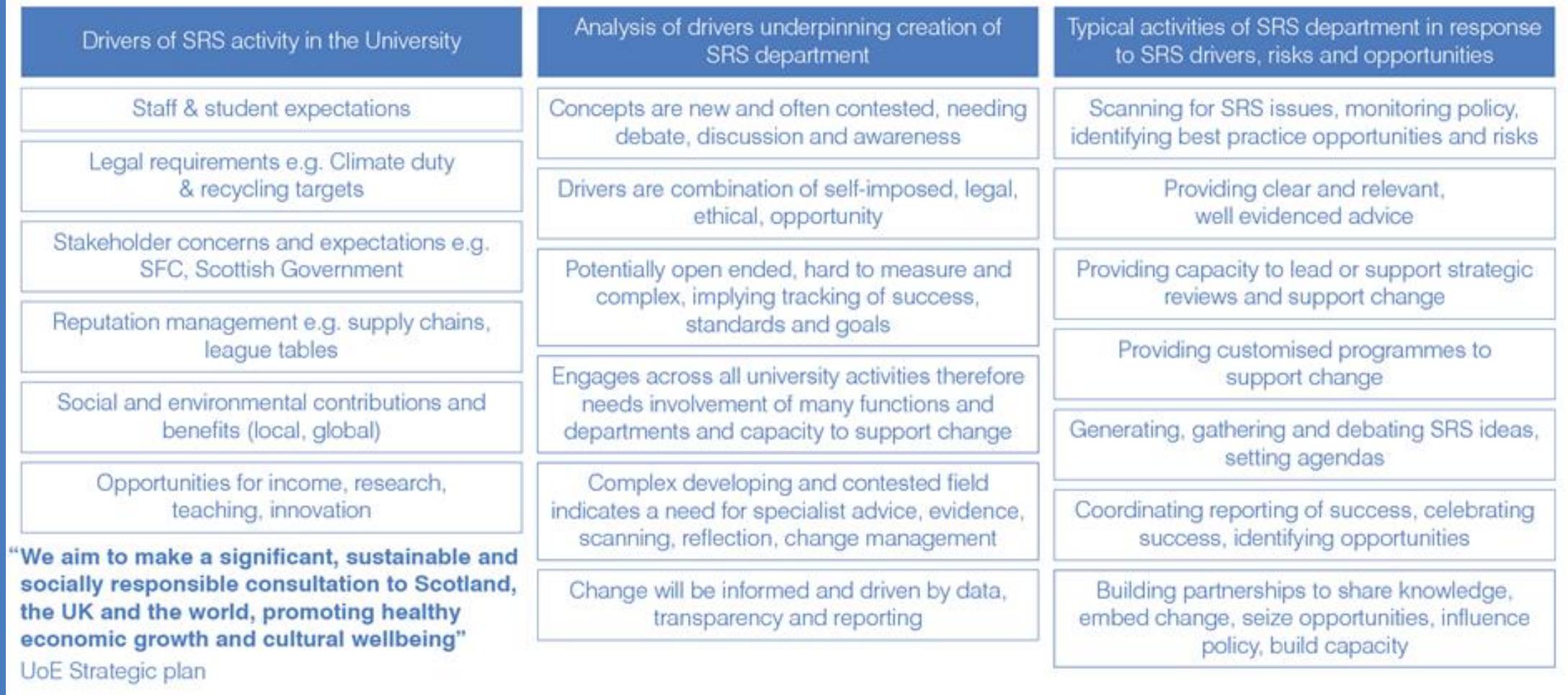
Department for SRS: What we do

Providing high quality advice, support and action on social responsibility and sustainability

- We **understand and explain** what the important risks and opportunities are
- We **develop** the University's response to these challenges and opportunities
- We **deliver** and facilitate programmes to catalyse action and collaboration across campus



Figure 1: Logic Model for Existence of SRS Department- Drivers, Analysis and Response



What is a Living Lab?

- *'using our own academic and student research capabilities to solve social responsibility and sustainability issues relating to our infrastructure and practices. Collaborative Living Lab projects can provide answers and guidance for operations and professional services staff; real-life learning opportunities for students; and opportunities for research impact for academics'* (University of Edinburgh, 2015).
- Solve a real life problem by developing an understanding of the context and developing practical solutions through research
- Develop collaboration with and buy-in from key stakeholders, providing an opportunity for recommendations for change to be taken up and tested
- Use existing and newly generated quantitative and qualitative data, embracing digital technologies where possible
- Trial and test ideas in real life settings – to further refine solutions proposed
- Share data and analysis generated openly, for the Living Lab to continue



Living Lab across HE sector...

- **University of Cambridge** dedicated Living Lab Coordinator, funding from Santander
- **University of Manchester** funded by University of Manchester Research Institute and the Higher Education Innovation Fund
- **Harvard University** new Living Lab course and fund.
- **University of British Columbia** focus on sustainable buildings as a test-bed for regenerative sustainability ideas (*Robinson et al 2013*).
- Living Lab at heart of International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) Charter (University of Edinburgh signatory).



Future University as Living Lab vision

- Learning organisation - different types of expertise collaborate on projects
- Interdisciplinary working the norm
- Roles of different types of staff and students would be flexible
- All learning documented, reflected on and shared
- University as a Living Lab embedded in staff inductions, student welcome weeks, job descriptions
- Commitment to open data
- Platform for sharing learning from academic and practitioner research relating to the organisation's own sustainable development progress



Student experience

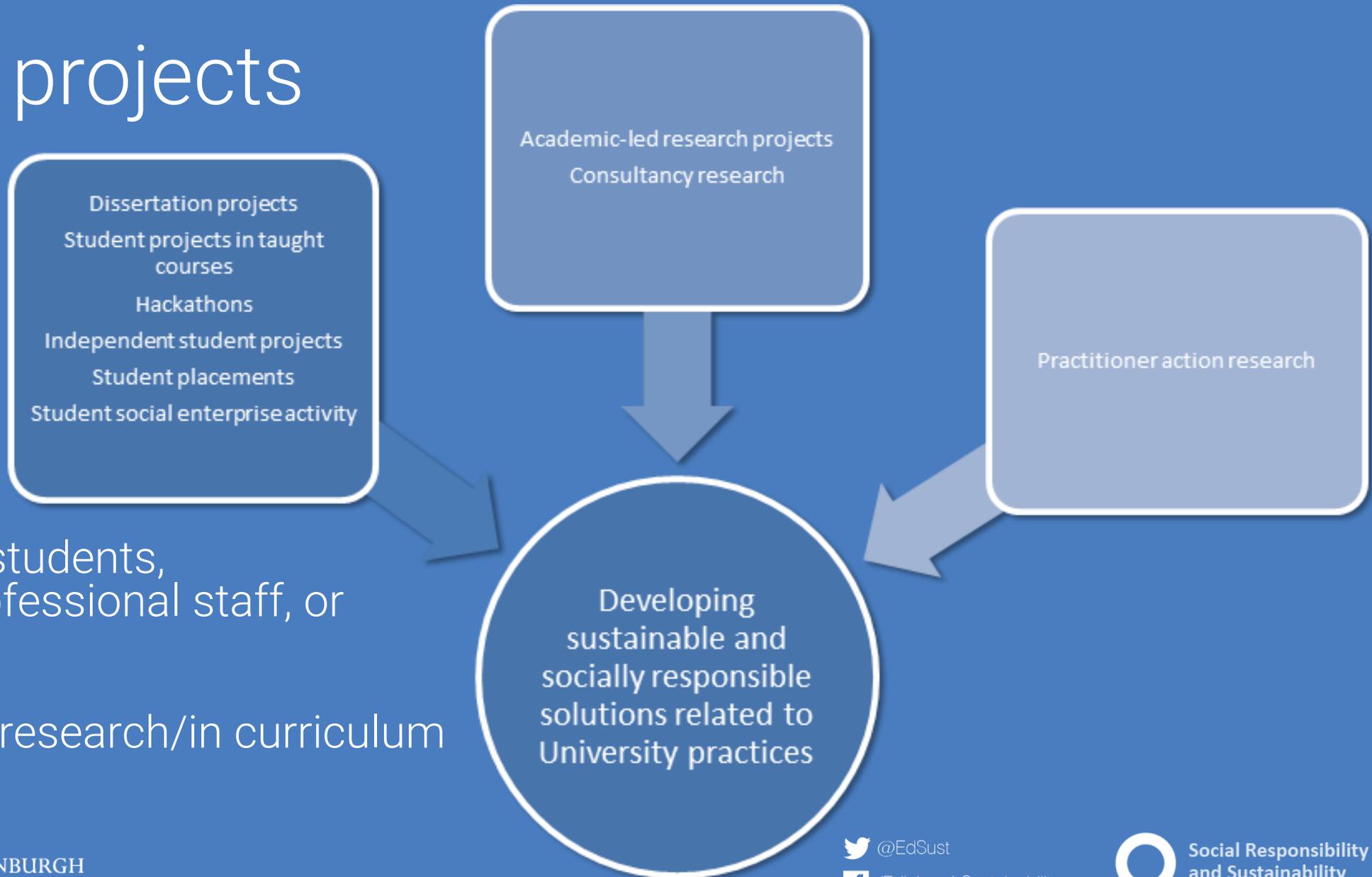
- Living Lab = opportunities to solve real-world problems collaboratively
- Campus as 'the most readily available laboratory for hands-on projects, and acts as a shadow curriculum for the students to apply to the campus what they learn in the classroom'. *Mcmillin and Dyball (2009; p.58)*
- Students more likely to buy into university sustainability policies if they have been involved in their development. *Moore et al (2005)*.
- 75% higher education students surveyed expect to develop sustainability skills as part of courses (*NUS 2016*).



Process

Stage	Activities
Problem identification and formation	Stakeholder workshops; briefing papers on background of issue; research on global best practice and 'gap analyses'
Data sharing and generation	Operations staff share quantitative data, automated data accessed, staff and students are interviewed/take part in focus groups, observations, reflective journaling, project meetings to reflect and analyse
Reporting and sharing findings and recommendations	Written report circulated; additional stakeholder workshops to move from questions to answers
Implementation of changes	As appropriate/feasible
Monitoring, modifying, reflecting	Embedding an action research approach
Sharing research	Research publications, conference presentations

Types of projects



- Can be led by students, operations/professional staff, or academics
- Can be formal research/in curriculum or informal

Examples

SRS programme/thematic area	Past/current projects
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy data visualization to engage building users • Project on improving energy coordinators network and effectiveness • Hugh Robson Building photovoltaics study • Undergraduate behaviour change in energy saving at home
Resource efficiency and circular economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to move towards circular economy at the University • Reducing contamination in waste streams • Developing waste champions
Fairness in trade and sustainable procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palm oil sustainability • Garment supply chains social responsibility • Tackling modern slavery in supply chains • Fair trade lentils in Malawi
Sustainable labs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measuring impact of 'switch off' materials • Freezer studies re temperature increase and energy saving • DNA storage
Sustainable travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing cycling
Responsible investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing social finance and social enterprise

Intro

Living Lab concept

Learning

Conclusion



Methodology

- [2015 research](#) commissioned to clarify approach and potential for upscaling it
 - Find out what Living Lab work happening across University
 - Interviews with academic and professional staff, student focus group
- Ongoing reflective learning as SRS practitioners
- Literature review and discussions with other universities/sector organisations



Challenges

- Divide between academics and non academics
- Misunderstandings – too theoretical (academics/students) vs too practical
- Different communication styles/use of language
- Different priorities (research funding and publications vs KPIs and short-term objectives)
- Limited time on all sides
- Concerns about sharing operational data
- Lack of understanding of concept/interest

“management do not seek out academic research to inform strategy; academics do not consult practitioners when defining research objectives.”

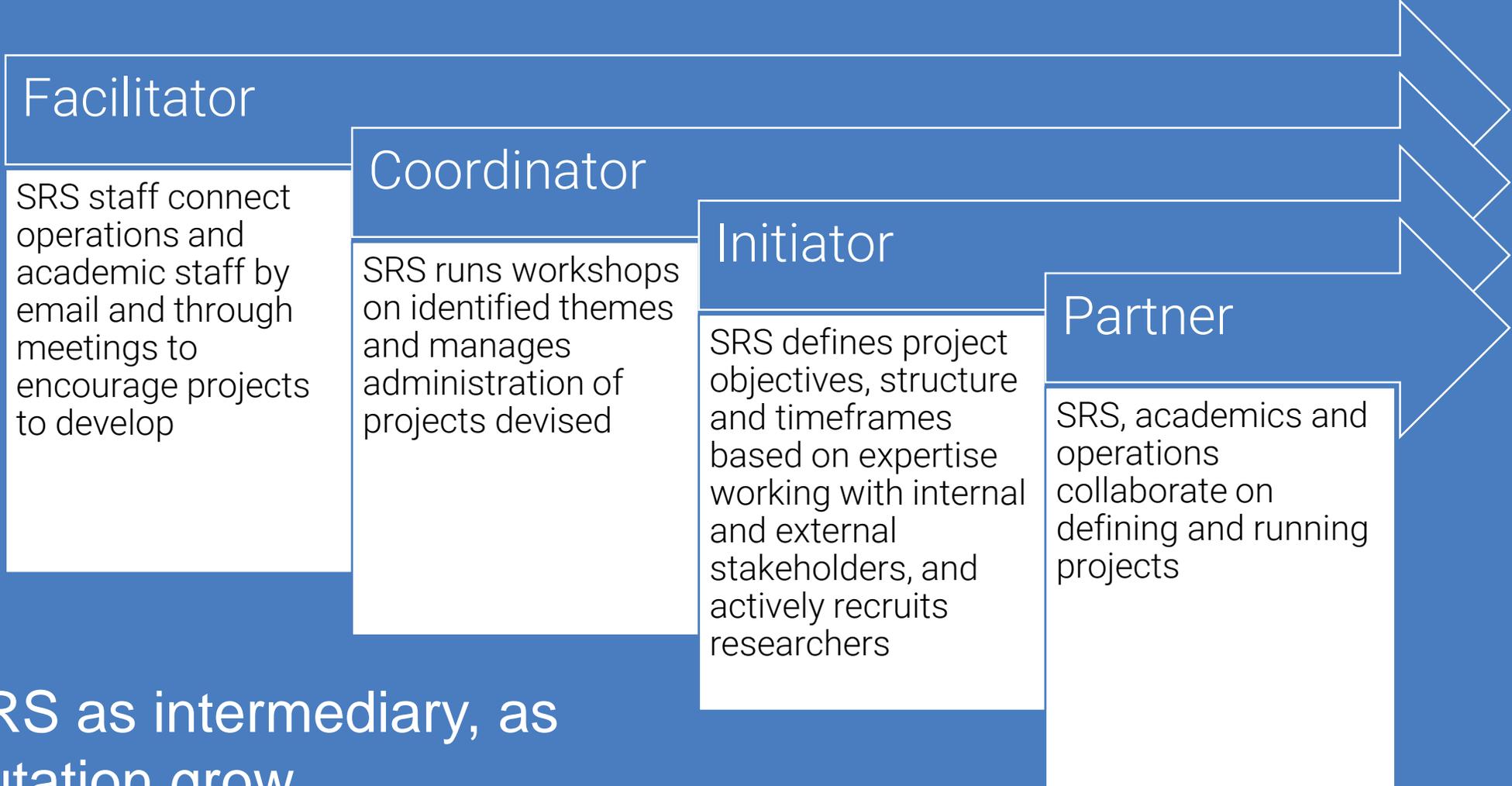
“people with an academic background stop reading academic journals when they take on a practitioner role.”

Rynes et al (2001)



L1: Intermediary role important

- Witchurch (2013): 'third space' professionals in universities who link research and practice (with both academic and practitioner skills) – e.g. SRS Department
- Bansal et al (2012) intermediaries help frame problems in ways that are specific and clear enough to be investigated by researchers, while at the same time reflect the 'messy reality of the problems of practice' (p.84).
- Point of contact for all
- Help researchers network e.g. SRS Academic Network and themed meetings



Journey of SRS as intermediary, as trust and reputation grow



L2: Clear definitions/guidance needed

- University as [Living Lab web pages](#) now include: definition, principles/criteria, case studies, guidance on:
 - Identifying a project
 - Forming a partnership
 - Data
 - Ethics
 - Ensuring longevity



L3: Public project database required

- To avoid risk if duplication of projects – build on previous projects' findings and recommendations
- Share datasets
- Inspire researchers with project ideas
- Inspire operations to contribute project ideas



L4: Need to continually work on senior buy-in

- Senior buy-in at Edinburgh:

- Close links with Assistant Principal – Living Lab champion (student experience angle is key)

- Academic leads – Edinburgh Living Lab

- Paper to Learning and Teaching Committee

- Buy-in from some corporate services directors

- Term 'living lab' now in University Strategic Plan *'Edinburgh is a living lab for our research and is an open classroom for our students to develop and apply their skills'* (p.5) (has been in SRS Strategies since 2010)

Enables operations to devote time to LL projects	Potential funding source
Encourages academic involvement in LL	Increases visibility if embedded in strategies



Future plans

- Open data approach within University operations, Data Governance Policy
- Living Lab in job descriptions/inductions
- Tapping into more funding opportunities
- Collaborating further with other universities



Conclusion

- Living Lab approach a key way a university can contribute to sustainable development.
- Solutions can be tested on campus, improve University impact, and inform wider world
- Value of intermediaries between researchers and practitioners
- Many challenges remain: how to involve more actors, how to collect, generate and manage data related to operational sustainability, how to co-devise projects that meet operational and academic needs...
- Sector organisations such as EAUC and ISCN have key roles in embedding Living Lab approach.

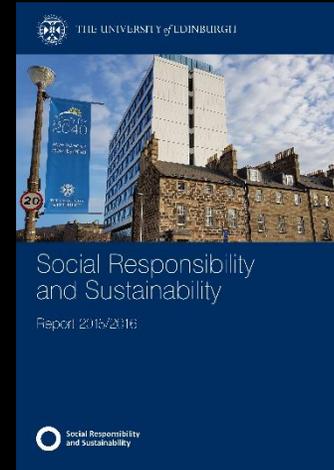
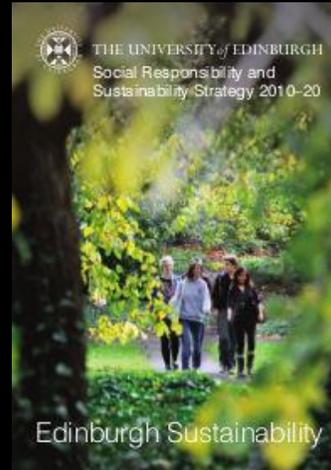


Thanks! Questions?

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Questions for audience

- Have you been involved in Living Lab type work at your institution?
- What would encourage you to become involved in such projects?
- What concerns do you have about this approach?



Biographies

- **Liz Cooper** is Research and Policy Manager in the Department for SRS at the University of Edinburgh. She leads on the Living Lab approach and supply chains social responsibility, and also works on responsible investment and SRS policy development. She previously worked in international development in Senegal and India with a focus on livelihoods, workers' rights and fair trade, and holds an MSc in Business and Community from the University of Bath.
- **Dave Gorman** is currently Director for Social Responsibility and Sustainability at the University of Edinburgh having previously been SEPA's Head of Strategy. After qualifying as an engineer, Dave took two years out to do a wide variety of community work, before returning to do a Masters in Energy and Environmental Systems at Glasgow Caledonian University. His current role includes senior leadership responsibility for the University's social responsibility and sustainability activities, as well as strategic advice on climate change issues, energy and a wide range of social responsibility and investment issues.

