



**Civic University**  
Network

Case Study:

# The London Met Lab: From Ambition to Action



**Sophie Clutterbuck, Director of London Engagement at London Metropolitan University,** reflects on the development of the London Met Lab and the University's commitment to tackling the inequalities facing the city in collaboration with local partners.

## Background

When London Met's Vice Chancellor, Professor Lynn Dobbs, joined the University two years ago, it was a natural time to reflect on London Met's institutional values and how we want to nurture these among our staff and students. First and foremost, we are a civic organisation - one that serves our communities, expands access to opportunities, with a commitment to social justice at our core. Our [new strategy](#), written in December 2019, reflects this.

The way we live becomes more and more globalised each day, and as a university we are proud of the impact our research has internationally; but it's an important part of our mission to focus on the difference we can make locally too. The London Met Lab represents an ambitious goal to develop lasting and meaningful engagement with partners across the capital as we work to deliver solutions to the challenges faced by local groups and communities.

Through a blend of research and impact work which supports the key priorities of partners, as well as practical action, such as volunteering initiatives or community development projects, the London Met Lab aims to foster a collaborative approach to making change. We are already working with over 600 partner organisations, including local authorities, charities, small businesses and grass-roots groups to improve people's lives and deliver social justice.

## Introducing the London Met Lab



After consultation with our staff experts in community and civic engagement, and of course, our partners, we decided to focus on six key social challenges facing the city: crime, poverty and deprivation, the environment, social wealth, discrimination, and health improvement. We then identified our Challenge Champions - staff across our academic schools and professional services whose expertise aligns with these key areas. They regularly meet to discuss issues and ideas for projects, and work on implementing them. This isn't a voluntary extra for them; it's a core part of their wider roles, for which they have been allocated hours to share their expertise and put ideas into action.

### Tree planting at Mudchute Farm

This has seen, for example, [over 400 trees planted at Mudchute Farm](#) on the Isle of Dogs as part of the Environment Challenge; [research into the rates of lockdown-compliance in North London communities](#), and the barriers to compliance, as part of the Health Improvement Challenge; a new [partnership agreement with Hackney council to rebuild an inclusive local](#)



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[economy](#), as part of the Social Wealth Challenge; and the beginnings of a new research project exploring the impact of COVID-19 on [LGBTQI+ communities in Lambeth](#), as part of the Discrimination Challenge.

We're also embedding the principles of civic engagement firmly into our curriculum, through a work-based learning module called [Empowering London](#). This allows students to work intensively with a grass-roots community project or organisation in order to identify a challenge they are faced with. Students will work towards positively addressing this challenge in partnership with them. When they graduate, they will take the skills and values of civic engagement with them into the wider world.

Through this partnership approach, we are finding new and innovative ways to respond to the city's needs and translate civic ambition into action; and we're always open to hearing from new partners who are keen to get involved.

If you're a London-based organisation who could benefit from our expertise or practical support, get in touch on [empowerlondon@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:empowerlondon@londonmet.ac.uk). We'd love to hear from you.

## **Empowering London module**

You can view a module guide (Level 5) [here](#).