Why does the world need a policy lab?

We live in deeply turbulent times, where huge social, political and economic challenges confront us all.

At the same time, people have lost faith in established institutions to respond to those challenges.

The University of Sydney has an opportunity and a duty both to help win back that trust and solve those problems.
Which are the best examples elsewhere?

The consistently top-rated initiative is the Ash Center at Harvard University.

The University of Chicago’s Institute for Politics also stands out.

The University of Cambridge’s Bennett Institute was founded at exactly the same time as the Sydney Policy Lab.
These are our comparators:
What do we learn from these comparators?

Each of these comparators:

– bring original academic research to bear on the biggest policy challenges of the moment

– provide constantly changing, publicly accessible commentary on immediate political events through blogs, vlogs, podcasts

– have a full programme of events, from closed policy seminars for experts to big public speeches

– offer a unique focus and method, which they emphasise clearly and consistently
What unique foci and methods do they offer?

Harvard
– Focus: enhancing democratic governance
– Method: turning academic research into material usable by the formal policy community, especially journalists

Chicago
– Focus: enhancing civic spirit
– Method: providing immersive educational experiences for students with politicians, campaigners and communities

Cambridge
– Focus: “disruption” and “populism”
– Method: large-scale original research projects, often externally funded
What is the overall thematic focus?

The Sydney Policy Lab team consulted widely with academics and staff of the University and with politicians, government agencies, campaigners, industry and community groups. These discussions have resulted in our thematic focus:

**Transforming ideas** – generating the big, bold ideas capable of responding to the enormous disruptive change on the horizon and aiding our country as it transitions to a new social, economic and political age.
This focus breaks down into three themes

**Equality**  How should we respond to the recent trend towards greater inequality, not just between the traditional socio-economic groups but also between generations, cultural and ethnic groups and regions of the country?

**Belonging**  How should we respond to the rise of fundamental questions of place and identity, including the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, patterns of migration and social integration, the so-called “culture wars”, the place of religion in society, changing understandings of gender?

**Power**  How should we respond to the decline in faith in the established institutions of democracy? Are there more radical alternatives to conventional representative politics emerging? Is it possible or helpful to talk of a period of post-democracy?
What is the method?

The Sydney Policy Lab will work exclusively by creating new, dynamic, creative partnerships which bring together the world-leading researchers of the University with groups from beyond academia, including policy-makers, advocates, campaigners and the broader community.
In practical terms, what does this mean will we do ... 

1. Collaborative research program

2. Training and education in collaboration

3. Members, visitors and fellows

4. Public communication and events
1. Collaborative research program

The Sydney Policy Lab will recruit **Research Leads** for each of the thematic priority areas: equality, belonging, power.

Leads will be appointed initially for one year, renewable for potentially two more years.

Leads will work with the Policy Lab team to create a program of collaborative research and activity in their thematic area, drawing on up to $75k p.a. in research funds, starting in January 2019.
2. Training and education in collaboration

Our consultation has revealed that there is huge appetite among academics to conduct collaborative work but that the following obstacles currently prevent it:

2.1 A lack of experience in working with policy makers or campaigning and community groups

2.2 A worry about working with the media and special interest groups

2.3 An anxiety about how to combine scholarly work and “impactful work”

2.4 A shortage of time and funds
Our program of training and education will respond to these concerns

We will provide a carefully tailored program of support for a select group of high potential researchers. This will include:

– bespoke advice, mentoring and coaching to each thematic research team about their individual project over a number of months

– a series of specifically designed masterclasses, including in co-design, engaging in the policy process, media strategy and public narrative available to all on a sign-up basis

– drop-in advisory services for researchers from across the University
3. Members, Fellows and Visitors

The Policy Lab will create:

3.1. A membership model with different categories for external advisors, University researchers, and the interested public

3.2. A Fellowship program that brings public policy professionals and campaigners into the University

3.3. A Global Visitors program that brings scholars with a world-class reputation for successful policy engagement to the University to run masterclasses and conduct original policy-relevant work
We are on our way …

June 2018

From Institute for Policy Research

Professor Nick Pearce
Director of the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) and Professor of Public Policy

Nick leads the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) across the range of its research, teaching, policy programmes and public engagement activity.

Leadership profile
View more person profiles in Institute for Policy Research

Units taught

Postgraduate

Nick is currently supervising or co-supervising doctoral students working on universal basic income, in-work benefits, big data and policing, and widening access to higher education.

Research

Nick is the co-author with Professor Michael Kenny of Shadows of Empire: The Anglophile in British Politics (Polity, 2018).

His current research interests include:
- the political economy of welfare state reform
- theories of public policy
- British politics, including devolution and political parties

Projects
- The idea of the Anglophile in British Politics
- Examining universal basic income
- Open City: London after Brexit
- The political economy of welfare state reform

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Profile

Meira Levinson is a normative political philosopher who writes about civic education, multiculturalism, youth empowerment, and educational ethics. In doing so, she draws upon scholarship from multiple disciplines as well as her eight years of experience teaching in the Atlanta and Boston Public Schools. Her most recent books include the co-edited Making Civics Count (Harvard Education Press, 2012) and No Child Left Behind (Harvard University Press, 2012). The latter book shows how schools can help tackle a civic empowerment gap that is as shameful and antidemocratic as the academic achievement gap targeted by No Child Left Behind. In 2013, it was awarded the Michael Harrington Award from the American Political Science Association, the Exemplary Research in Social Studies Award from the National Council for the Social Studies, and a Critics Choice Award from the American Educational Studies Association. It also won the 2014 North American Society for Social Philosophy Book Award. Levinson fosters civic education scholarship at Harvard as co-convenor of HGSE’s Civic and Moral Education Initiative.

Levinson has been awarded a 2014 Guggenheim Fellowship to support her newest project, on "Justice in Schools." In this work, she combines philosophical analysis and school-based case studies to illuminate the complex dimensions of evaluating, achieving, and teaching justice in schools. The project is intended to give educators tools for making just decisions in their own practice, and also to push political theorists to develop theories of justice that are robust enough to address complex school-based dilemmas. This project, like her previous research, reflects Levinson’s commitment to achieving productive cross-fertilization — without loss of rigor — among scholarship, policy, and practice.
4. Public communications and events

We are developing:

4.1. Policy Lab breakfasts on major topics in public policy

4.2. A series of visiting speaker public discussion sessions

4.3. A series of closed policy discussions with key decision-makers

4.4. An interactive website with commentary on major policy issues, equivalent to our major comparators
We are on our way...
What does success look like?

We aim to:

*create new and dynamic partnerships* that bridge the gap between the academic and policy-making communities and include new or previously excluded voices in the policymaking and research process.

*build the skills and capabilities of University of Sydney researchers* to conduct genuinely impactful research and to feel confident in engaging in policy-making, campaigning and advocacy in the longer term.

*challenge prevailing orthodoxies of policymakers* where required, opening up new debates and generating innovative policy programs and ideas.

*help effect a positive change in public policy* capable of enhancing the quality of life available to citizens, including citizens’ economic well-being, the quality of their democratic experience and their secure sense of belonging in society.