

# ENDURING LINKS, INSPIRING FUTURE

The University of Southampton's links with India stretch back more than half a century. Re:action spoke to Professor Jane Falkingham CBE (Vice-President Engagement and International) and Professor Andrew Atherton (Vice-President International and Engagement) about the history and future of the University's relationship with India.



Professor Jane Falkingham

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“We have welcomed Indian scholars and students for decades, and Southampton researchers have worked productively with Indian institutions since the early 1970s,” explained Jane.

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David's collaborations, which span 50 years, have been recognised with prestigious fellowships from the Indian Academy of Engineering and the Indian National Science Academy (INSA). Wendy has strong research links with IIT-Bangalore and IIT-Madras and is currently involved in the development of a joint UK-India research centre in AI, to be funded by the UK and Indian governments.

“Today these links extend across the University,” continued Jane. “For example, Professor Craig Hutton (Sustainability and Resilience Institute) has been researching the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities around India's river systems for the past two decades.

“In Social Sciences we have long-standing partnerships with institutions including the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, and the University of Kerala. Together with Southampton, these three universities received Indian Council for Social Sciences Research, and Economic and Social Research Council funding to study 'Ageing and

wellbeing in a globalizing world'. For the past decade, Arts and Humanities researchers have been working with O.P. Jindal Global University.”

The University maintains valued links with the UK's South Asian community too. Lord Patel of Bradford OBE was appointed joint Chancellor of the University in May 2024 and is a founding patron of the University's India Centre. One of Southampton's two Members of Parliament is University alumna Satvir Kaur, who previously served as the first female Sikh leader of a local authority in Britain.

“Hampshire and Southampton have strong historical ties with India,” commented Jane. It was in Southampton that Mahatma Gandhi first set foot in the UK on 27 October 1888 as an 18-year-old law student. The University also holds The Mountbatten Archive – a remarkable collection of materials covering Lord Mountbatten's life, including his time as Viceroy of India.

### **The India Centre**

In March 2019 the University, recognising the need to harness the breadth of engagement with India across the institution, established The India Centre for Inclusive Growth and Sustainable Development (see page 10). “The India Centre provides a framework for people to come together and make connections and plays a vital role in nurturing relationships with India and Southampton's South Asian community,” explained Jane, who is a co-founding director.

### **India's National Education Policy**

In 2020, the Indian Government announced plans for major changes to its National



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Education Policy (NEP), including the internationalisation of higher education, which would allow foreign universities to establish branch campuses in India for the first time (under regulations announced in 2023).

Jane, who was both Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Vice President International at the time, drafted the University's international strategy in 2021. "As part of Vice-Chancellor Professor Mark E. Smith's vision, the strategy identified an ambition to expand the University's international footprint by opening three new campuses by 2030," explained Jane. Professor Andrew Atherton was appointed in 2022 to lead on realising this ambition.

#### A warm welcome

For Southampton, India was the first choice of location for a new campus. The country's "growing demographic, increasing participation in higher education, and propensity for families to invest in their children's university education" were key, commented Andrew. As was its vast untapped potential: "There is a large proportion of students in India leaving the secondary education system with very high

scores, compared with the number of places available at top-ranked higher education institutions," he explained.

India is also becoming "more enterprising and entrepreneurial," said Andrew. The Indian Government's 'Startup India' programme, designed to build a strong innovation ecosystem, aligns with Southampton's knowledge exchange and enterprise goals.

Building on the foundation of the University's historic ties with India, Southampton's application to establish a campus in Delhi was warmly welcomed, said Andrew. "The level of engagement and support we've had across the Indian Government has been outstanding. They are excited to have a top 100 Russell Group university establishing a presence in the country."

#### University of Southampton Delhi

For Indian students, University of Southampton Delhi offers access to a global top 100 university (currently the only one in India), and the advantages of an international education, at a considerably lower cost than studying overseas.

The students expected to benefit most are those whose families want to invest significantly in their future but are not in a position to fund overseas study. This is something Andrew is proud of. "We are offering them something they wouldn't have been able to experience otherwise. And these are the people who will change India as it grows. That long-term impact is really important."

For UK researchers and students, the India campus offers outstanding opportunities. "Addressing challenges such as sustainability, water and energy are priorities both for us and for the Indian Government," said Jane. "This is hugely exciting in terms of research potential."

With the same curriculum and quality of education being offered in both Southampton and Delhi, and in other locations in the near future, students will be able to spend a semester at an overseas campus. "For global citizens of the 21st century, having an understanding of India will be important. This is an incredibly valuable opportunity," concluded Jane.