

CRITICAL TO DELIVERING IMPACT

“It is important to recognise that external partnerships are critical to deliver impact,” said Rosemary Nunn, Head of Business and Industry Partnerships in Research and Innovation Services. “They offer us a unique pathway to impact.”

In 2021/22 the National Centre for Universities and Business reported that over £1billion of UK academic funding comes from interaction with business annually, 25% of which is with SMEs (small to medium sized enterprises).

Collaboration with business at an early stage of research is now expected by research funding councils. Business engagement plays an increasingly important part in the Research Excellence Framework (REF), in particular the Engagement and Impact element (25%), and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) assessment exercises. Both of these directly (REF) and indirectly (KEF) inform the allocation of government funding to universities.

The value of the intellectual property and the intellectual capital in UK universities is well-known, believes Rosemary, but the full potential return on investment is yet to be realised as a comprehensive knowledge base remains elusive.

In the past, she explained, large research-intensive universities tended to focus on “profit-maximising pathways” from their research such as intellectual property, leading to technology transfer and commercialisation.



“But all of the knowledge and information that exists outside of the things on that pathway didn’t necessarily get curated, or built into an accessible, searchable environment.”

Driving maximum value

An economist by training, Rosemary began her career designing and implementing processes to gather, analyse and share sector knowledge within the defence industry – which led to a fascination with the

role of knowledge in driving innovation and growth.

A 20-year career in Strategy, Innovation, and Knowledge Management followed, with director-level roles with major corporates, as well as running her own business, I&K – the Innovation and Knowledge Agency. She was Head of Commercialisation and Innovation at the University of Greenwich for two years before joining Southampton in 2023 following a move to the Isle of Wight.

Her role at the University of Southampton was a welcome opportunity to step into a more research-intensive environment and develop her interest in what she calls “the whole picture.” Rosemary’s focus is on helping businesses to understand the full scope of what the University has to offer and driving maximum value from relationships.

“We have a broad and impressive range of propositions to offer industry, and vice versa,” she explained. External partnerships might provide any combination of potential benefits: from research collaboration and generating income, to supporting the University’s sustainability work or civic agenda, utilising specialist facilities, or providing opportunities for students and graduates.



“The University has many valuable long-standing relationships and deep research collaborations with business,” said Rosemary, “but there is an opportunity to increase the number and depth of those partnerships.”

She is conducting a review of strategic partnerships and mapping the current landscape of business relationships across the University. Large corporations are likely to offer “multiple touchpoints” with the University’s work, she explained. Where those partnerships focus on one academic or research group only, there is a risk that wider opportunities might be missed.

Led by Rosemary, the Business and Industry Partnerships team exists to support and enhance those relationships. Their industry knowledge and understanding of the breadth of the University’s capabilities can help to recognise who else might derive value from the relationship, and “maximise the potential for collaboration and income generation.”

The team can also help with sector expertise, contacts, approaches, and establishing partnerships.

“If you’re thinking about engaging with business, come and talk to us,” said Rosemary.

Growth strategies

Rosemary is also focused on growing partnerships in key sectors. She is developing value propositions setting out the expertise, capability and facilities that the University has to offer particular sectors, beginning with AI for Healthcare, and Marine and Maritime.

Explaining how she works with the University’s pipeline of potential partners, Rosemary said:

“We are testing a new approach, asking companies to share their innovation roadmap with us, under a non-disclosure agreement, and then we are aligning that roadmap to our academic capabilities and value propositions. We are looking at multi-disciplinary routes into companies’ major innovation projects.”

The team has recently developed a new strategic partnership in professional services, one of the few specific sectors listed in the Government’s new Industrial Strategy Green Paper. Other sectors in focus are engineering, including manufacturing, defence, aerospace and space; transport and logistics; the wider healthcare sector; and advanced technology; as well as supporting strategic developments such as the Centre for Green Maritime Innovation (CGMI) and the Institute for Medical Innovation (IMI).

Working with SMEs in the region and beyond, is also central to Rosemary’s vision. “Innovate UK (the UK’s national innovation agency) sees SMEs as the growth engine for the UK economy,” she commented. Partnerships with SMEs support the University’s public and community engagement and are key to the University’s Civic Agenda for local growth and regeneration.

Whether through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, place-based impact acceleration, or engagement with the Help to Grow Management programme offered through Southampton Business School, Rosemary sees working with SMEs as “offering significant untapped potential as a route to impact and income generation.”

The University has an “open door to business,” she concluded.

Read more about the BIP team’s work with SMEs on page 24.

The Business and Industry Partnerships (BIP) team can be contacted on:
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SECTOR FOCUS: HEALTHCARE

Some of the University’s most successful relationships with business are in healthcare. Partnerships provide vital income, advance the University’s research, and drive progress in addressing global health challenges. They can involve commissioning or collaborating on research, joint grant applications, clinical trials, consultancy, or accessing specialist facilities.

Established partnerships include with GSK, AstraZeneca, Bioinvent, Bristol Myers Squibb, Pfizer, and Roche.

It is Corporate Partnerships Manager Charlotte Shearing’s job to nurture and steward these relationships, along with Corporate Partnerships Officer Hannah Illsley. As healthcare sector specialists, they play a key role in matching industry’s requirements with research expertise.

“I will help our academics to understand how they could work with a company,” said Charlotte.

“And if a company comes to us and says, “I am interested in a particular patient cohort, facility, or capability,” I would know who in the University could support this, what form a partnership might take, and the most cost-effective way to do it.”

The Business and Industry Partnerships (BIP) team’s position within RIS, alongside the University’s intellectual property and contracts specialists, also helps partnerships run smoothly.

Sector specialists

Keeping up with University developments, partners’ innovation goals, industry changes, and government priorities, helps to ensure that they spot opportunities to extend existing partnerships. “It is part of our job to find the hidden gems within the University,” said Charlotte.

In partnerships with huge corporations, major research collaborations will often grow out of existing relationships with an academic, but there may be opportunities to develop relationships with other parts of the company.

A call for UKRI Prosperity Partnership funding (which supports business and academic research partnerships), for example, prompted Charlotte to link a contact within AstraZeneca’s imaging arm with Professor of Molecular BioPhotonics and Imaging, Sumeet Mahajan, leading to a successful joint application.

Hannah recently succeeded in including Bristol Myers Squibb, whose collaboration with the University had mainly focused on cancer



“It is part of our job to find the hidden gems within the University.”
Charlotte Shearing

research, in the Student Innovation Challenge. Run by the Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise team (see page 31), the challenge offers students the chance to work as a group to solve a problem set by industry.

Going forward, a key focus for development with new and existing partners is Med Tech (which covers all technologies used for medical purposes), including Digital Health.



Bristol Myers Squibb Student Innovation Challenge 2024
Blue team (joint winners)



Bristol Myers Squibb Student Innovation Challenge 2024
Red team (joint winners)



Hannah Illsley



PARTNERSHIPS DRIVING NEW TREATMENTS

Healthcare sector partnerships, including with GSK and AstraZeneca, generate multi-million pounds in income for the University of Southampton, and lead to real-world progress in understanding and treating a range of conditions.

Work on Covid-19 with AstraZeneca and the Faculty of Medicine's respiratory medicine specialists, led by Professor Tom Wilkinson from Clinical and Experimental Sciences,

resulted in new patient treatments during the pandemic.

Professor Wilkinson has also collaborated with GSK on major research into asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

His research group's long-standing partnership with AstraZeneca is investigating differences in gene expression which drive

the immune response to viral infection in COPD, which causes more than three million deaths a year worldwide. Tom said:

"This important programme of research aims to provide ground-breaking insights into disease mechanisms of COPD and will help us work towards the development of a new generation of much-needed therapies."