

# ACCELERATING OUR IMPACT



Taking research into the real world and effecting change is what we all strive for. This mission sits at the heart of a set of strategic funding awards that are presenting new opportunities for collaborative projects.

Pots of money dedicated to boosting the impact of academic research are making a big difference here in Southampton – particularly when it comes to bringing academia and industry together.

UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI's) Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs) are strategic awards that were introduced in 2014. They are provided to research-intensive institutions to allow them to respond to impact opportunities in more flexible, responsive and creative ways, and to design and deliver activities that best suit their institutional strategies.

Awards are intended to add value to existing funding and to take advantage of new or unforeseen opportunities to make 'impact' happen. They are designed to ensure research benefits society, the environment, culture, the economy, policy, services and health.

The IAAs at Southampton are managed centrally by RIS' Impact Funding team alongside dedicated IAA funding panels, and they report to the Southampton Enterprise Board.

## Introducing NPIF

One IAA that has been making a big impact is NPIF – the ESRC's National Productivity Investment Fund – which supports Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and postgraduate students (PGRs) to collaborate and engage with businesses.

Under NPIF, the University received a £100,000 award that started in February 2020 and runs until March 2022 to build on relations with the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership, which includes the universities of Portsmouth and Brighton.

Leigh Purdie, Impact Funding Officer, explained: "The primary purpose of NPIF is to further develop the skills of social science

ECRs and PGRs, and increase confidence in working with industry, at the universities of Southampton, Portsmouth and Brighton.

"After COVID-19 hit, the NPIF steering committee, which has academic and professional services representation from all three universities, decided that to use NPIF funding to support businesses with COVID-19 recovery and resilience."

Two ECRs – Hien Nguyen from Southampton and Shuangfa Huang from Portsmouth – were appointed to work together, with the support of Director of Enterprise and Knowledge Exchange Diana Galpin, on a scoping project to analyse business needs with Hampshire and Dorset Local Enterprise Partnerships, councils and business growth forums. They then mapped these needs with key expertise from all three universities. The scoping project led to five NPIF-funded projects.

## EVENTS AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

### Skillfluence

RIS' Impact Funding team has collaborated with Skillfluence to deliver a series of training seminars – funded by the NPIF award – for ECRs keen to engage with industry.

Sessions that have run to date include a two-day Working with Industry training and business networking event, a workshop on Employability and Engaging with Industry,

and an 11-week online course for social science ECRs and PGRs called Connecting with Industry. A series of free seminars has just ended, on topics including An Introduction to IP, Creative Innovation, Bench to Market, Science Communication, and Creative Problem-Solving.

### 'Speed dating'

An NPIF-funded 'speed dating' event organised by University of Southampton

is scheduled for March 2022, with final details to be confirmed. This event will be an opportunity for ECRs and PGRs to use the skills from their training and engage with invited local businesses in order to discuss ways in which their research knowledge can benefit these organisations.

Details will be published on the Impact Funding team's pages of the RIS SharePoint site when the event is finalised.



#### Our other IAAs

In addition to NPIF, RIS' Impact Funding team holds three other Impact Acceleration Accounts. They are the ESRC IAA, the EPSRC IAA and the STFC IAA. They allow the University to respond to knowledge exchange opportunities with users of our research in more flexible, responsive and creative ways, such as through projects, secondments, events, training or building relationships to accelerate the translation of research outputs into impacts that will benefit society.

Contact [impact@soton.ac.uk](mailto:impact@soton.ac.uk) for more information.

#### Supporting the COVID recovery

The projects supported were:

*Hand-in-hand: Entrepreneurial Resilience and Entrepreneurial Identity Building*, led by Dr Ekaterina Murzacheva from the University of Portsmouth's Strategy, Enterprise and Innovation group. The project supported a restaurant business that was negatively affected by the pandemic, and provided training for those who were made redundant, lost their employment or became furloughed to develop their entrepreneurial skills.

*Social Enterprise Crowdfunding, Digital Competence and Post-Covid Recovery*, led by Dr Raymond Xiaoti Hu, Lecturer in Strategy and Entrepreneurship at Southampton. This project has examined how crowdfunding and digital competence can support SMEs – particularly social enterprises – in their post-COVID-19 recovery.

*Social and lifestyle differentials underlying health and wealth inequalities among the South Asian population in England*, led by Dr Jason Hilton, Lecturer in Social Statistics and Data Science at Southampton. Data following the outbreak of COVID-19 shows evidence of disproportionate impact of the disease and mortality burden amongst ethnic minorities. The structural inequalities underlying this spread across a broad spectrum of demographic, social, economic, health behaviours, lifestyle and environmental factors, and these vary by geographic regions. Working with Asian Media Group, this project systematically documented the social and lifestyle indicators of consumer behaviours among different generations of South Asian communities and examined the underlying inequalities of wealth and health outcomes.

*Development of additional products and service ideas for Boatshed Ltd*, led by Dr Phill McGowan, Interim Head of Marketing

Subject Group at Portsmouth. This project supported Boatshed Ltd, a local firm that sells second-hand boats, in developing ideas for new products and services by conducting a market assessment. Of particular note was the potential to develop a yacht sustainability rating that could be applied to both new and second-hand boats, which would inform potential buyers about the environmental impact of ownership and use.

*Digital transformation plan and optimisation of booking and scheduling system*, led by Dr Fatema Zaghoul, Lecturer in the Business School at Portsmouth, and Dr Nigel Williams, Reader in Project Management at Portsmouth. The project team worked with a company that runs plumbing and electrical training for green energy installations. The aim was to propose improvements to the company's current booking, student records and learning management systems, bringing in automation to improve information sharing.



Participants of the Hand-in-hand NPIF-funded project celebrating the outcomes of the project

## HARMONISING THE IAAs

Earlier this year, UKRI took the opportunity to 'harmonise' IAA funding across councils. In the first instance, this brings together – into one pot – IAA funding from AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC, STFC and the MRC Confidence in Concept programme (our current ESRC IAA continues to March 2023).

The UKRI website states: "Through harmonisation, UKRI is seeking to better enable the generation of impact through

alignment of timelines and processes, including award duration and monitoring, to allow organisations to improve strategic planning for developing research impact across and between disciplines."

The outcome of our harmonised IAA applications is expected by February 2022.