



**OXFORD  
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# **RESEARCH REPORTER**

**2021-2022**

**RESEARCH WITH IMPACT**



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# HELLO AND WELCOME...

...to this edition of Research Reporter, highlighting some of the latest research from Oxford Brookes Business School.



We are living in turbulent times. Over the past 12 months, undertaking research has been challenging, yet, arguably, its value has never been greater. This is best exemplified by the scientific discoveries of researchers pioneering the coronavirus vaccinations, although the wider societal and economic importance of research across many disciplines has also come to the fore. Colleagues at Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS) are engaged in a range of research projects investigating the economic and social impacts of the pandemic with industry and government partners. These projects will help to prioritise policies and contribute to recovery in all areas of life.

The pandemic has changed the way in which many people work, including those employed by universities. For our research colleagues, this has meant being flexible in the both the content of research, and established ways of working, responding to logistical difficulties, and adopting new practices.

Despite COVID, the varied research culture at Oxford Brookes Business School has continued to flourish. This issue of Research Reporter showcases the breadth of topics covered. We have clustered research around the positive impacts: for the lives of individuals,

for the communities we live and work with, nationally, and globally.

Research is central to our newly launched Mission and Vision. We believe the Business School needs to be ambitious in the range and scope of research projects we undertake, and by doing so we will provide unique insights into under-researched areas, and inspire future thinkers. Embracing change and being brave in research topics can help to transform people's futures, as some of the examples in this edition of show.

As a Business School we understand the importance of continuing to invest in and develop existing strengths, fostering expertise and building on our reputation. But we are also forging new research areas, embracing technological change, and collaborating with new partners. Our flagship research centres are engaged in projects nationally and internationally, and our doctoral programme continues to go from strength to strength, supporting emerging academics, and widening our networks.

Colleagues across Oxford Brookes Business School continue to collaborate with a wide range of businesses, large and small, to share new insights, from our projects funded by Innovate UK to support innovation and growth, to our research with sector bodies and regulators, and our projects with government organisations, regionally, nationally and internationally. As an engaged Business School, we understand the importance of working with both public and private partners to affect change and have positive impact on all levels of society.

Although these are turbulent times, they are also exciting ones for the Business School's research community. I hope the impressive work of my colleagues showcased here piques your interest, and inspires you to explore ways of collaborating with us!

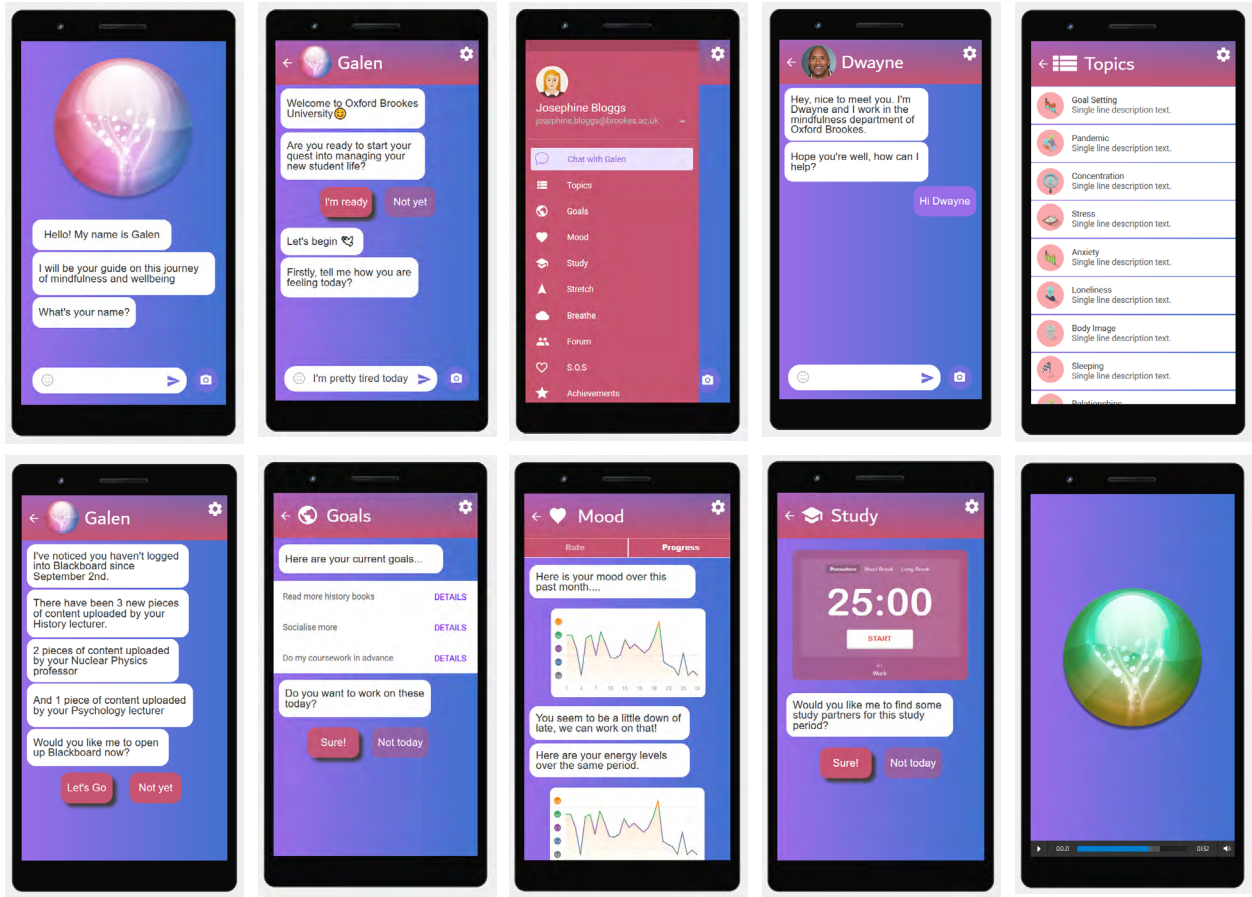
**PROFESSOR TIM VORLEY**  
Pro Vice-Chancellor and  
Dean of Oxford Brookes Business School





# INDIVIDUALS

Global concerns, including the pandemic and climate change, are having profound effects on the way we work, behave and feel as individuals. Much of the research undertaken through the Business School addresses these changes to our lives. Whether it is mental well-being, our motivations in work, or the role models and resources we need to adopt sustainable behaviours, our research unpacks the complexities, and provides positive, evidence-based solutions to problems.



## DIGITAL WELL-BEING



**Finding ways to improve individual mental health and well-being, particularly during times of stress and crisis, is important. COVID-19 highlighted many mental health issues experienced by young people, including those at university. Higher Education institutions are struggling to provide support, and many well-being services are stretched to breaking point.**

First year undergraduate students fall into an age group which is particularly vulnerable to mental health problems. Nearly 7% of first year students drop out: with devastating consequences for the individual students, many of whom feel they have ‘failed’. Their universities suffer financial loss, and society in general pays a price (students who complete undergraduate degrees increase their social capital by 28%

and contribute significantly to the economy). These are some of the issues which sit behind Dr Christian Ehrlich’s research, which has won significant funding from Innovate UK. Christian is working in conjunction with Syndeo, a Belfast based IT solutions company specialising in Artificial Intelligence, to develop an app to help first year undergraduate students successfully transition into university life. The Digital Well-being Coach (DWC) is intended to help students pursue their educational goals in a way that maintains, or even increases, their well-being during the first, challenging year of study. The DWC engages with students through an informal, AI-based chatbot-driven conversation. It aims to offer personalised mental health advice for each student around goal-setting or mindfulness, as well as other relevant well-being information and exercises. A unique feature is the app’s direct integration into the virtual learning platforms used by students (Moodle or Blackboard), which will provide resources. In addition, the DWC will provide access to relevant university

well-being support and services. Christian explains, ‘We’re designing the app to encourage students to consider their mental health whilst they’re studying. The hope is to be able to ‘nudge’ them into good behaviour, and integrate self-awareness into their everyday lives. It will allow monitoring of their engagement with course materials too. The app will use state of the art emotion-technology. Often students’ well-being services are siloed or students feel a stigma in admitting their concerns. But because the chatbot is anonymous, we hope to break that pattern. I hope this will be a significant step towards students taking their own mental health seriously – and giving them tools to address their problems.’

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## WINNING TALENT



**In a world of chaos and stress, people are asking what they really want from work. This question lies at the heart**

**of Dr Grzegorz Kapuscinski's research into attracting talent into the workforce of tourism and hospitality organisations. Given the importance of these sectors to local and national economies, recruiting, developing, and retaining the right applicants is vital.**

Shortage of staff in these sectors has attracted widespread attention. Brexit and negative impressions of work conditions have contributed to the problem, so unpacking what makes an attractive employer can help organisations differentiate themselves

from competitors and assist good recruitment.

Grzegorz's research concentrates on the needs of the talent pool, and the perspective of job seekers. Given rising uncertainty in the job-market and individual concerns about work/life balance and mental health, the research aims to help both individual candidates and potential employers. Using information collected through a series of focus-groups, it uncovers the personal values which inform the choices of final year university students seeking employment in hospitality. The research is a joint project with Dr Nathan Zhang and Dr Rachel Wang. Grzegorz explains how it identifies 'value-maps' that comprise of employer attributes, the consequences of these attributes, and the personal values of individuals.

'We found that there are three broad value structures informing candidate

choices. "Psychological values" include self-esteem, happiness, health, freedom and trust. "Development values" include recognition and achievement, suggesting job applicants prioritise employers providing career-enhancing experience, but they also want to be noticed as a result of working for an organisation. Finally, the "Social values" consist of helping and connecting with others, underscoring work specific to service contexts,' Grzegorz says.

'We often assume we understand what drives people's decisions and ambitions in the world of work, for example, compensation packages. But the surprising thing about this research is that it shows Generation Z are more interested in psychological well-being'.

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## CULTIVATING GREEN BEHAVIOURS



**How can individuals be encouraged to behave in environmentally responsible ways? How can they be supported in green behaviours in their homes, as consumers and at work? Dr Khan Taufique's research concentrates on the motivators which cultivate sustainable attitudes.**

Over the last year, he has completed a study into green behaviour in the workplace, which involved surveys and one-to-one interviews with more than three hundred employees recruited from a range of Bangladeshi organisations – the country's largest private telecoms company, three public universities and five private banks.

The main findings were that employees in a collectivist culture think 'in-group' and the behaviours of 'important others' matter in terms of providing role models who can influence individuals at all levels in an organisation.

'People respond to positive role models, so that if they see colleagues or seniors at work promoting good environmental behaviours, they are likely to do similarly,' explains Khan. 'Positive internal messaging around green attitudes to work can be fostered in internal communications.'

Secondly, the research found that most employees have positive interests in acting sustainably outside their work roles, but these attitudes can be brought into the workplace as habits if companies and organisations provide encouraging information (e.g. around the benefits of choosing public transport to travel to the work), resources (e.g. technologies) and training. Providing such organisational support can help employees translate

their attitudes into positive behavioural habits towards green behaviour at workplace.

'It might be something as simple as companies providing recycling facilities,' says Khan, 'But these are clear ways in which individuals can be helped to bring their sustainable attitudes and interests into their work roles. This research is particularly important in countries like Bangladesh where companies have not been as pro-active as they might in this area. My research focuses on the interconnected nature of our encounters and that we all have

an important role to play in reducing waste and encouraging sustainability. My research seeks to examine those interconnections, and provide evidence for best practice.'

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# COMMUNITIES

Each of us is embedded in networks and communities which support and define our day-to-day existence – from our neighbourhoods, to our places of work. Business School research is being conducted into different local and organisational structures, and examining how they can be improved. From developing new approaches to food security, to leadership in the workplace, our academics are researching innovative ways in which communities can build resilience for the future.



## ENSURING FOOD SECURITY



**COVID-19 and Brexit have led to multiple challenges, not least in ensuring communities are able to access adequate healthy food. Disrupted supply chains and economic uncertainty have made many people, particularly the 'shielded vulnerable', anxious about food security. The full impact of anxiety and food shortages on public health is not well understood or evidenced. Dr Maheshan De Silva Kanakaratne is part of a team working on ways to provide data, develop a technical solution and alleviate concern.**

'Building cohesive communities around food brings huge social benefits, but there is an urgency to delivering greater coordination and transparency of supply. Our work is about developing an innovative Web/Smartphone app – called FoodPINNER – which will support and enhance local food supply

channels, allowing food resources to be "pinned" onto an online map,' he explains.

The need for innovative solutions to food and nutrition insecurity was highlighted by COVID-19 and Brexit. The pandemic showed that resilient and sustainable supply chains are important, and that food insecurity has a detrimental effect on physical and mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing. More than three million people reported going hungry during the first three weeks of the first UK COVID-19 lockdown. Around 10 million people in Britain regularly struggle to afford enough food.

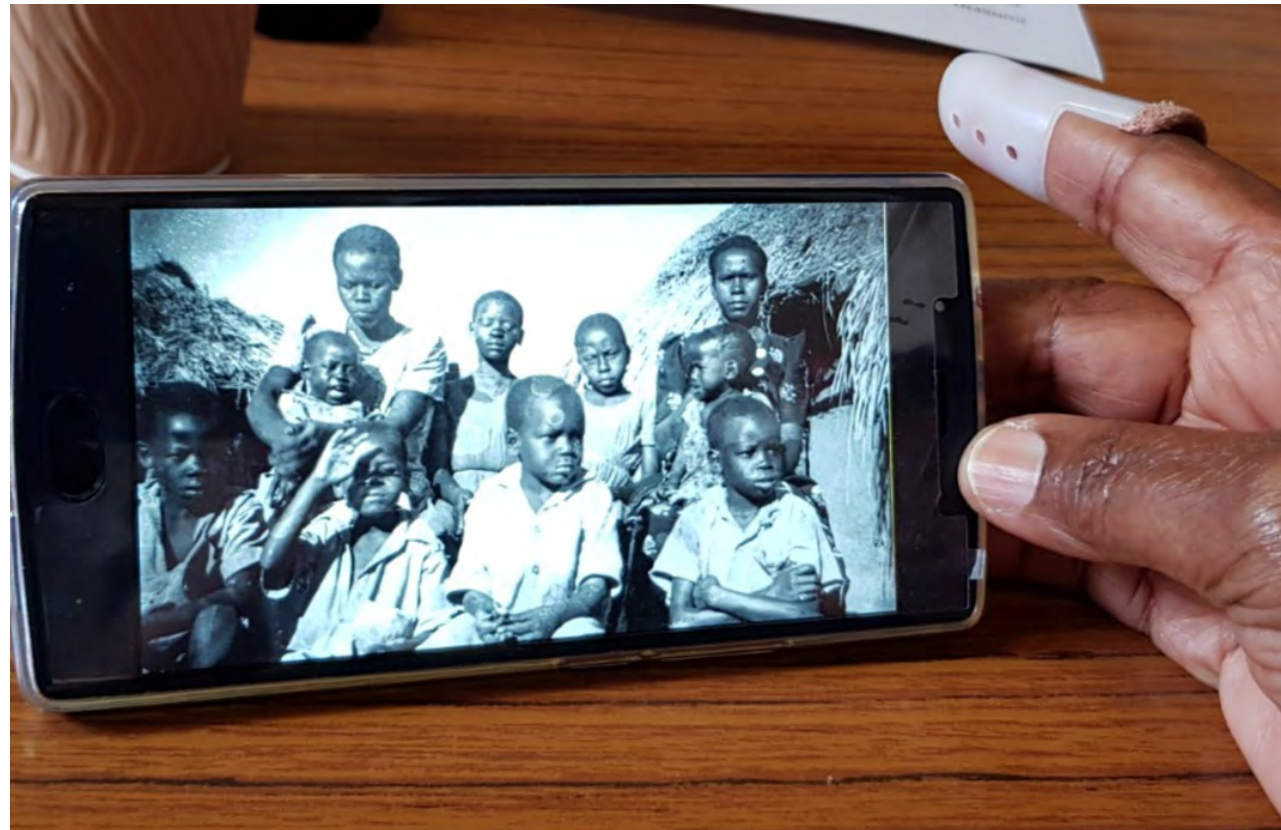
Effective interventions can prevent anxiety and reduce harm to health. Maheshan's work aims to help understand the complex systems involved and the impact on individuals and communities. FoodPINNER will include information from farmers, food banks, community resources and small-holders providing localised, and 'real-time', food supply information, coordinated and orchestrated by local government.

In addition to helping producers and consumers, the FoodPINNER app will play an important role in supporting vulnerable individuals registered with Local Authorities. It is being designed as a tool which can bolster their psychological and societal resilience, ensuring access to food during times of crisis.

'FoodPINNER is novel and will make a vital and timely contribution to understanding the cultural context of food-related behaviour during times of crisis. It will encourage diversified food supply, as well as shorter, nimbler supply chains and support retail displacement. We have to think creatively about food security. Food banks aren't sufficient. We have to work together to develop new solutions and promote a food system which is fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. Our work is about making a contribution to that.'

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## CREATIVITY THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES



**The last two years has shown the importance of digital technologies in providing connectivity and building communities, but how do different groups use them, and how can they be developed appropriately? Dr Sarah Quinton is leading a team of researchers investigating the technological adoption of older people, focusing on fostering creativity.**

The inter-disciplinary project funded by Oxford Brookes as a research excellence award (which involves colleagues from other Oxford Brookes faculties and Turin and Maynooth Universities), ran workshops in Italy, Ireland and England to better understand technology enabled creativity.

The project's underpinning mission was the inclusion of older people

throughout the research project. 'We wanted older people to be involved in the design and implementation of the project, as well as just providing the data,' explains Sarah, 'So, we ran workshops to ensure they were part of every stage, and very much integrated into the research team.'

The research indicates that a wide variety of creative endeavours by older people is being enabled through digital technologies, including basket weaving, singing in choirs online, painting, poetry and ancestry research. The data included video and images of creative outputs, audio and text-based materials. On one occasion participants used software (called Jamboard) to live-capture post-it notes, as if participants had been in the same room together.

Emerging results indicate digital technologies can have positive impacts in fostering creative activities for older people, and that collective creative endeavours can enhance self-esteem and reduce feelings of isolation. But there are additional lessons: older people can be put-off by technical terms and jargon, and older individuals

might benefit from specific technical support in the form of 'buddying'.

Sarah explains, 'Older people can derive enormous benefits from digital creative interactions with others, but may need additional support to access technologies or overcome anxieties. This research, as a whole, has shown how much older people have to offer to society – and how, if we want to conduct research directed at understanding an integrated society, we need to embed older people in the structure of our research projects.'

She suggests that by involving older people as co-researchers, the project has been much more flexible and by using peer to peer data collection, the information gathered has been frank and authentic. Sarah suggests the academics involved have learnt a lot from their 'senior' co-researchers, and that once fully analysed, data from these workshops will create a framework for good practice for research involving older people. This framework will be publicly available from the project microsite in 2022.

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## LEADING THE WAY



**Cultivating leadership in large businesses and public and third sector organisations is widely recognised as an important factor in success. There is a growing realisation that it involves the development of leadership capacity of teams, groups and whole organisations, rather than a handful of individuals. But the bulk of research into leadership development is still often conducted in classroom settings and focuses on the skills and capabilities of individuals.**

Dr Sylwia Ciuk's research (undertaken with Professor Doris Schedlitzki from London Metropolitan University), is an in-depth case study of a multinational organisation undertaking an in-house leadership development programme aimed at the whole workforce.

Sylwia's research aims to understand the reality of factors which help or hinder these types of programme, since companies commit huge amounts of resource to them.

The organisation in question, which employs 90,000 staff worldwide, was in recovery from a turbulent period marked by poor financial performance and unprecedented staff turnover. Leadership development for all of its staff was expected to help organisational renewal. Regardless of their formal position, speciality or seniority, all staff were expected to perform leadership as part of their roles. This was seen as particularly important for middle managers who were often critiqued by the executive team as avoiding responsibility, failing to see the bigger picture and lacking initiative – characteristics which became part of a local definition of leadership. The company launched an organisation-wide, in-house educational and promotional leadership development programme intended to send a clear signal to staff that 'everyone can and should engage in leadership'.

Sylwia's says her research shows the exercise was fraught with challenges.

'It was not only staff who were seen as most needing leadership development who seemed to struggle with the

distribution of leadership. Senior managers, many recently appointed, faced considerable pressure to prove themselves in their leadership roles and to secure quick performance improvements. They saw sharing decision-making powers with middle managers as challenging and impractical and continued to revert to more directive, authority-based leadership in their everyday actions. As a result, they inadvertently undermined the distribution of leadership that they themselves vigorously promoted and perpetuated the dominance of a traditional, authority-based leadership as part of the organisation's culture.'

The study demonstrates that executives who want to promote leadership development among staff need to reflect carefully about the extent to which specific conditions and work arrangements in their organisation support such initiatives. For such programmes to work, care needs to be taken to ensure staff work-context and performance evaluations do not focus on individualised performance indicators which can undermine collaboration and the sharing of leadership.

Research takeaway 'top tips' to cultivate distributed leadership include:

- Promote an understanding of leadership, encouraging openness to collective, multi-directional influencing
- Be mindful of practices which reinforce more traditional notions of leadership as influencing over others
- Ensure working environments support the distribution of leadership. For example, review and reconsider individualising performance management systems. Reward collaboration and joint effort instead of putting a premium on individual performance
- Senior leaders can role model and engage in distributed leadership instead of perpetuating formal, authority-based leadership models.

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# NATIONAL

The breadth and scope of research undertaken at the Business School is wide and exciting, and can often be applied at the national level. Current research is being undertaken into themes and issues which affect how we celebrate, educate, innovate and create positive national policies and practices. From the social and cultural benefits of festivals, to responsible investment, Business School research is contributing to the national conversations.



## FESTIVALS TRANSFORMING LIVES



Lockdowns and the social distancing brought about by the pandemic showed the importance of cultural events for society and their role in enhancing social cohesion and community wellbeing. There is a wealth of academic literature about the economic impacts of events and festivals, but Dr Giulia Rossetti believes much more needs to be done to fully understand their socio-cultural outcomes. Her research addresses this, by investigating the role festivals play in supporting communities, educating people, and transforming lives.

Her study explores the cultural value of two literary festivals (one in Ireland and one in Italy). The focus of the research is to understand if, and how, people acquire cultural resources by participating in festivals.

Giulia explains, 'At festivals people can be inspired to learn skills and acquire knowledge which may not be related to the specific content of the festival. So, for example, at a book festival, audience members might attend writing workshops where they extend their own skills, not just listen to authors talk about their books.'

Giulia uses cultural sociology and leisure theories to investigate how adult festival attendees learn, develop skills, interests, values, and behaviours. The research shows how festivals are also occasions to purchase cultural goods, like books or paintings. Attendees at the festivals studied both acquired new cultural resources or were stimulated to accumulate and embody culture once the festivals were over. Attendees discovered something new about books, the towns, or the topics of the events they attended. So, the culture acquired at the festivals was not only associated to literature.

The research contributes to understanding the role of festivals in making culture accessible and enhancing cultural sustainability. Giulia believes more study is required into festivals' positive and negative impacts on people's lives, culture, and education. Now that many events have gone virtual or hybrid, there is particular scope for more research to explore how the new ways in which people are consuming and participating in festivals.

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## IMAGINATION, INNOVATION AND INCLUSION



How can inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship be encouraged in educational institutions? For a number of years, the Business School has been examining this question through Spinout companies – companies which develop as a result of research conducted in Higher Education Institutions. The Royal College of Art (RCA) is the university with the highest proportion of Spinouts founded by women. Dr Heather Griffiths has been undertaking research with the assistance of Jasmin Khokhra, an MA student, to understand why.

'Studying the success of the RCA provides a route to encouraging and supporting creation and innovation in Higher Education institutions. The research aims to understand how their culture supports inclusive and diverse academic entrepreneurship,' Heather says. 'It is interesting how, unlike some other institutions, the RCA recognises that students, not just staff, can be innovators. They encourage a design-led pedagogy, and foster innovation from the beginning.'

The research shows that the RCA supports more women to develop their ideas by pushing the notion of entrepreneurship beyond the typical remit of STEM subjects. Heather explains the interdisciplinary background of those concerned may be key,

'I can't reveal the detail of the innovations – they are still commercially sensitive – but some of them are really exciting, and have unexpected cross fertilisation of different experiences and values. For example, one combines knowledge of textiles with chemistry. We hope to understand how the cross-disciplinary approach encourages diverse thinking and recognition for talent from a broad range of disciplines.'

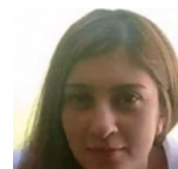
The study aims to examine how institutional policies and practices can help with the design of products and services which can be taken to market, and to create a set of recommendations for universities.

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## ENGAGING WITH INVESTMENT



Following the financial crisis in 2008, institutional investors were criticised for lack of active engagement

in the companies in which they had invested. As investors, they had not effectively exercised their rights to prevent corporate failures, resulting in the loss of trillions of dollars from global stock markets. As a consequence, in 2010, the UK's Financial Reporting Council (FRC) developed and published a Stewardship Code to "enhance the quality of engagement between institutional investors and companies to help improve long-term returns to shareholders and the

efficient exercise of governance responsibilities". Over a decade later, Dr Sameneh Elmah's research aims to examine how useful it really is.

The Code, which was revised in 2020, increased expectations around environmental, social and governance issues. It was the first such set of guidelines in the world, targeting investors, rather than directors, to enhance corporates' performance, and was seen as an important part of improving company practice. Other countries followed the UK's lead.

But, despite more than 90 companies signing up, and using it as part of their annual reporting procedures, the Code has received limited academic attention. Sameneh's work aims to rectify that.

'After the global economic crash,

investor companies were criticised for being like 'absent landlords', interested only in profit,' she explains. 'The Code offered guidance on how the situation might be improved, and how they might take responsibility and improve engagement with the corporations in which they invest. I'm interested in how effective the Code has been, and, whether or not it is just a cosmetic exercise or achieving its proposed aims. I hope the research will also provide understanding of the practical issues faced by asset managers as well as insight for policymakers on how to drive the engagement agenda forward.'

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# THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF RESEARCH



**The pandemic has required researchers to respond rapidly and flexibly to changing circumstances – addressing logistical problems, shifting budgets and embracing technology to keep work on track. Here Professor Peter Lugosi provides a personal account of the impact of Covid 19 on research he has been doing for the Business School.**

Managing international collaborative projects is always tricky. Working with colleagues from diverse disciplines is itself a challenge, and differences in language, time zones, and organisational bureaucracies add more complications. The pandemic has magnified these pressures for researchers, but it has also encouraged us to take risks, adapt to adversity, driving us to foster new skills and support colleagues.

The letter from the British Academy informing us of our successful grant application arrived in late September 2020, and by the time we could proceed to the fieldwork in Brazil, the situation was rapidly deteriorating. A multidisciplinary team of researchers had planned to visit São Paulo to film a documentary and interview migrant entrepreneurs about their experiences. As hopes of international travel evaporated, we became totally reliant on our local Brazilian researchers, Eanne and Aluizio, to recruit participants and convince them to take the time necessary to participate. Successful social science research always relies on building relationships and trust, persuading diverse people to contribute, to make abstract ideas meaningful and engaging. Lockdowns and social distancing measures complicated things. Ensuring everyone's safety throughout

the process remained paramount, often against a backdrop of rapidly shifting events.

Initially, Eanne could visit venues in person, but recruiting participants increasingly relied on social media, and in many cases, interviews were conducted via video messaging apps. A lot of participating entrepreneurs were forced to switch their businesses and communications online, so virtual interaction became easier as the pandemic developed. As customer footfall fell, and some businesses were shuttered, several of the owners had extra time to reflect on their lives and challenges, providing greater insight in their interviews. Nevertheless, for our field researchers, it was more stressful and required more effort than we originally imagined. The research team, based at five different institutions (2 in Brazil and 3 in the UK), needed to provide virtual briefings, oversight, encouraging emails and remote support throughout the project's intensive timeline.

The British Academy allowed us to reallocate monies originally budgeted for travel to Eanne and Aluizio, meaning they could take longer building rapport with participants and ensuring fieldwork was undertaken safely. Consequently, they collected a set of rich stories and captured the essence of migrants' ventures in an extensive catalogue of images. Eanne became a documentary maker through the process, complementing her interview skills with filming and editing. So, while working during the pandemic provided valuable lessons for managing international collaborative projects, it has also been a powerful reminder of the ingenuity and determination of local fieldworkers. Recognising their capabilities, investing in their development and rewarding their work are essential to success, and allow us to connect with places that we cannot hope to by ourselves.

Our research participants, migrant entrepreneurs, have always had to adapt to new circumstances and show resourcefulness. Now, with the difficulties presented by the pandemic, academic researchers are having to embrace similar, enterprising attitudes. In our case, project management required most of us in the team to accept that we had to relinquish control over many aspects of the research. Instead, we became coaches for the local researchers, empowering them to embody the whole multidisciplinary team in the field. As the pandemic progresses, social science research will need to respond, adapt and evolve in response both to the challenges and the opportunities presented.

**PROFESSOR PETER LUGOSI**  
Deputy Director of the Centre for Business, Society and Global Challenges and Research Lead for the Hospitality and Tourism subject area



# RESEARCH IMPACT

Impact in 'research terms' is widely understood to be how the knowledge generated positively influences our communities, environment, culture, society and economy. Here we highlight examples of the impact made Oxford Brookes Business School research.

## SOCIAL IMPACT



Helping refugees enter and thrive in the labour market is key to their settlement and successful social integration. Support for refugees often comes from a patchwork of state, commercial and charitable organisations, each with their own areas of expertise and limited resources. Professor Peter Lugosi is working with colleagues on international collaborative projects which have helped to identify innovative and effective interventions in the UK, France, Germany and Brazil, and to share good practice among various support networks. Pooling this expertise and making it freely available to organisations expands their individual capacities while facilitating their collaboration on impactful initiatives.

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## ACADEMIC IMPACT



Mentoring is now firmly established as a positive tool for personal development in organisations, and the Business School supports academic research into best practice through the STAMINA Mentoring Network, developed by Dr Judie Gannon. The national group, which is for mentoring scheme leads, co-ordinators, administrators and champions, has developed a framework to ensure the sustainability of Mentoring. This draws on different formats of mentoring and how different schemes have developed and operate. The network helps connect mentoring scheme managers and provides unique resources for both researchers and practitioners.

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## ECONOMIC IMPACT



Digital transformation amongst Large Established Organisations (LEOs) is important as they provide key contributions to the national and global economy. Adopting digital technology to increase productivity is crucial to their future success, as the pandemic has shown. In addition to using internal knowledge, sources and resources (such as their own staff) for innovation (of products, services, business models, processes etc.) LEOs must create 'open innovation' using multiple external sources, including data from customer feedback and the public. Dr Jeremy Zwiegelaar and a team of researchers at Oxford Brookes are considering different business models and the use of open innovation in response to the needs of the new Digital Age. Digital transformation creates benefits such as reduced transaction costs (with fewer manual processes), increased productivity (automating processes) and contributes positively to LEOs' economic performance.

The DIGIT Lab Project (Digital Innovation for Growth, Impact and Transformation) Project is being undertaken with Exeter University and the University of East Anglia.

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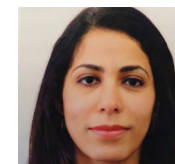


# GLOBAL

Studies from the Business School are often undertaken internationally – focusing on case studies and original research conducted in different countries, drawing on comparisons between global regions, or through collaborative projects with institutions from different continents. The interconnectedness of many of our experiences and institutions provides rich sources of materials for academic enquiry. Our research is responding to many of the world's challenges - developing new skills in the tourism and heritage sectors to increase sustainability, supporting female entrepreneurs in conflict zones, and providing route-maps through the maze of the financial and business world.



## SUPPORTING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN CONFLICT CONTEXTS



**Violent conflict has increased over the last two decades, mainly in the Middle East, where there is a high level of poverty and unemployment. Addressing this is one of the main challenges for achieving the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, and empowering women in these contexts is crucial to tackling the problems. Dr Doaa Althalathini's research examines the roles of female entrepreneurs.**

She says, 'Research in conflict regions is still limited and difficult, but it needs to be undertaken to contextualise policies and interventions, and help find real world solutions to problems. Research in this area often presents women as victims and dependents while overlooking their contributions to socio-economic life.'

By examining female income generation in the Gaza Strip conflict zone, and women's defiance of limiting patriarchal gender norms in Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine utilising their Islamic beliefs, Doaa's research gives voice to women entrepreneurs. It highlights the challenges they face and the value they add, not only to their own lives, but those of their families and societies. Doaa suggests these women not only create economic value, but also social value by empowering other women and promoting gender equality. But they still

face considerable challenges operating businesses in politically unstable, economically fragile and socially conservative contexts.

'These women have to be innovative in very difficult circumstances. For example, some work "informally", exporting their products in suitcases or via courier companies. Underdeveloped infrastructure negatively impacts on their businesses' chance of survival,' says Doaa. 'Patriarchal gender norms restrict women's travel opportunities and access to resources. I hope that through this research, I will help highlight some of the problems they face whilst contributing to economic development and peacebuilding.'

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## DIGITAL STORY-TELLING AND TOURISM



**Story-telling lies at the heart of Dr Fabian Frenzel's research, which aims to increase virtual connectivity**

**for community-based tourism and heritage groups. He was already working on ways such groups can develop their attractions sustainably and attract new audiences, but the pandemic hastened the urgency of his work and created the opportunity for a pilot project in Brazil. 'Lockdown Stories' involved tourism providers in six Brazilian favelas transferring their story-telling online. Fabian gives the example of how the 'Museum of the Favela' presented a graffiti trail through its neighbourhood as a live online tour, sharing the experiences with audiences virtually. The project enhanced the digital skills of those involved with the museum, but also created new audiences for the city's heritage.**

'Whilst numbers of tourists and travelers may reduce for all sorts of reasons – the pandemic or environmental concerns – my research is looking at how communities can be empowered to share their stories or history in new ways, developing and evolving heritage and creating new resources for new audiences.'

As a result of Lockdown Stories, the Museum of the Favela has been encouraged to access more funding in Brazil and has further develop their virtual tourism provision.

Building on the success of the pilot, Fabian's research is now extended to more locations – from the favelas of Brazil, to rural communities in Malaysia and the historic coastal town of Ilya de Mozambique. Working with researchers from Bournemouth University, Universidad Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, University of Malaysia Sarawak and Universidade Lurio, he is developing a network of international projects where story-telling is enhanced through digital media, in very different settings.

The research looks at how communities tell stories about themselves, and to others, and by

changing the media of interactions, how access to new audiences is widened, as Fabian explains,

'The workshops and conferences we are running in these very different places, are educational opportunities developing skills and sharing experiences of, for example, how to film local sites and create compelling online stories. The events themselves foster sustainability at an emotional and social level, allowing local guides and organisations to network.'

The research will also attract new tourists and new markets for virtual experiences of places, as Fabian explains,

'The resources created can be used in education, so for example, British geography students could 'visit' the favelas from their own homes and schools. The possibilities of this sort of work are endless and exciting.'

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## A FINANCIAL ATLAS OF THE WORLD



**Financial and business services (FABS), including law, accounting, and business consulting, have been one of the most dynamic sectors of the world economy, with a fivefold rise in real value added since circa 1980. Although FABS are central to the processes of globalisation, financialisation, urbanisation and development, understanding of the sector in the context of the tumultuous changes of the early 21st century is only partial.**

Dr Stefanos Ioannou is participating in a ground-breaking five-year collaborative research project with scholars from different disciplines and different institutions (headed up by

Oxford University), to map the role and influence of FABS. Those involved with the project come from a wide range of disciplines, including economics, economic geography, and sociology, and the areas being addressed are wide-ranging too. As Stefanos explains,

'The global financial crisis of 2008 showed how we are all dependent on these services, but how little is understood about their role and impact on the economy and society. The project aims to ask, and answer, some big questions around the inner-workings of the sector.

Questions like - Does finance contribute to economic development of cities and countries? Does it contain or augment income inequality? What turns cities into financial centres, and how do global financial centres form networks across borders? What is financial technology, and how can it reduce financial exclusion? How can finance help tackle climate change?

A distinctive part of the project, besides publications of academic articles and book chapters, is the world's first ever Atlas of Finance, (to be published by Yale University Press in 2022). It aims to cover all sorts of aspects in which finance penetrates everyday lives, from issues of offshore finance, to the relationship between finance and art, and gender balance on boards of large financial companies. It's intended that the Atlas will help scholars, business and ordinary members of the public readily access complicated inter-relationships and complex information.

Stefanos says, 'It's been very exciting working on such an ambitious project, tackling huge themes and making them accessible for broad audiences. We want to help people understand how FABS affect all possible areas of finance in real life.'

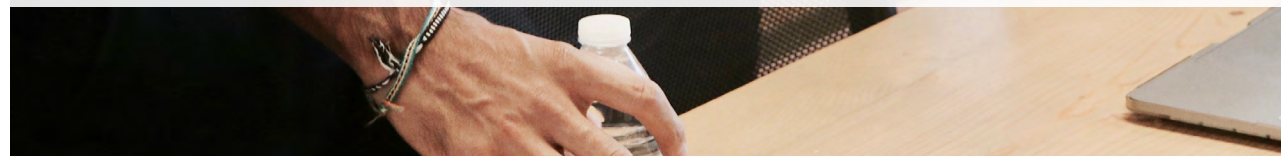
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# PHD STUDENTS' RESEARCH

Doctoral students play an important part in the Business School. PhD research is often a first significant step towards a career in academia; for others, Doctoral research leads to employment in diverse arenas. We support and encourage students as they undertake their ambitious research projects, and benefit as an institution from their wide areas of expertise and knowledge. Here is small taster of some of the Doctoral research currently being undertaken at the Business School.



## ROBERT KEMP



Maintaining an appropriate demeanour at work, and conforming to the 'display rules' of a profession are described as Emotional Labour (EL). It is work which sometimes requires effort and can cause stress, and occasionally even burnout. Emotional Labour and its effects have been well researched in multiple contexts, but not in the field of Coaching. Robert Kemp's research is addressing that lack.

'The research has shown disparate views of what coaches are supposed to be like and how they should appear and behave. It's flushed out issues around coaches' views of professional bodies' codes of practice and ethics. There's another dimension too, around how coaching is presented to stakeholders and those paying for coaching – it requires a sort of 'commercial Emotional Labour' – which is an interesting notion to be considered in other spheres where similar transactions occur,' says Rob.

Coaches who participated in the study revealed concerns and issues around 'authenticity', and how they protect themselves from Emotional Labour by externalising their inner thoughts.

Rob believes the findings will have implications for varied audiences, including coaches, supervisors of coaching, professional bodies, and organisations

contracting coaching. The research has a potential to impact positively on the practice of coaching itself, and contribute to wider research on the phenomenon of Emotional Labour. But, in the first instance, Rob hopes it will push the issue of well-being higher up the agenda for coaches - rather than practitioners simply being seen in service of coaching, at times, to their own detriment.

## STEVE TAYLOR

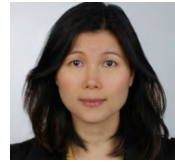


Football Managers (FM) face a job that could be characterised as a game of snakes and ladders. They are highly visible individuals: viewed, critiqued, lauded and pilloried by many different stakeholders in an intensely competitive field. Some will experience moments of glory; the majority will struggle against relegation.

Steve Taylor's research uncovers the complexity of football management and in particular the relative power relations between stakeholders, and how this affects managers' ability to use political strategies and micropolitical acts to survive the first few weeks. Fans, the board, media and agents play their part in trying to influence football managers. Steve's results show that effectively they try to be social chameleons – everything to all stakeholders. Being a Football Manager is not for the faint hearted.



## VAN THI NGUYEN



It's easy for different sectors to make positive environmental claims, but how much is 'greenwashing'? Van Thi Nguyen's research examines the claims of the hugely important hospitality sector, and asks how the sustainable aims of hotels compete with other priorities, including productivity.

Working with one of the world's top three hotel chains, Van has been investigating how hotel employees respond to the demands of their jobs, in light of their own views on the environment, and the stated aims of the company.

'I've been specifically looking at energy consumption, and how hotel staff do their jobs. I'm interested in actual, granular behaviours. For example, do cleaning staff turn off the lights when they are under pressure both to satisfy customers and get a certain number of rooms cleaned in a short space of time? What are the most important drivers of behaviour, values around the environment or productivity?'

Her findings suggest the latter take precedence. Van's work addresses how companies can develop frameworks of effective communication and sustainability.

'My research is intended to support real world change, so that hotels and the hospitality sector do more than make grand claims, but actually achieve real sustainability.'

## BENITA MAYHEAD



The coaching industry has many sub-disciplines, including that of the Executive Coach – the coach who works with executives from middle management upwards in a one-to-one relationship, in partnership with their organisation. Benita Mayhead is an Executive Coach herself, and is undertaking research around the moral and ethical territory in what is an unregulated and fragmented industry.

She has interviewed over 30 Executive Coaches to examine the issue of 'duty of care': how individual Executive Coaches act in promoting the welfare of others, associated with their own sense of what is fair and right, connected to their own principles of behaviour.

Benita explains, 'The work of Executive Coaches is highly complex and carries significant responsibility.'

Although there have been calls for the introduction of obligatory membership to a regulatory or professional coaching body to help protect clients and safeguard the industry, professional coaching body codes focus primarily on principles of competence and skill, rather than the moral and ethical side of a coach's practice. I hope to push duty of care up the agenda.'

## DEJI MAKINDE



Church attendance is in decline in the UK, except in one striking area – Megachurches. Although there are only a handful of these churches in the country, they attract more than 2000 attendees every week. Deji

Makinde's is researching one such Megachurch to try to understand the relationship between its identity and its organisational strategy. Deji explains the importance of the research,

'Churches have hardly been researched in this way, but they are important to examine, and can give us different perspectives from secular organisations, not least because they have the additional pressure of spiritual beliefs. Megachurches have very clear identities, and at the same time they have very distinct strategic practices – that can mean everything from what kind of music they play to how they use social media. My research aims to explore the interplay between the two concepts. It will illuminate issues for churches, but also for secular organisations.'

Deji hopes that his research will help organisations understand how identities impact on the specifics of what organisations do, and reveal blind spots and missed opportunities. 'The identity of an organisation, in his case Megachurches, really matters – it impacts on your decision-making around resources and those who engage with you.'

**For further information on doctoral programmes please contact Dr David Bowen, Head of Doctoral Programmes, [dbowen@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:dbowen@brookes.ac.uk)**

# WORKING WITH BUSINESS



## Small Business Charter: Opening Doors

Oxford Brookes University has been awarded the [Small Business Charter](#) in recognition of its support for local small and medium-sized organisations. Although such awards are nice to have, gaining SBC status has opened the door for Oxford Brookes Business School to be one of 30+ business schools in the country eligible to deliver the government's [Help to Grow Programme](#) which aims to support 30,000 businesses in the next 3 years. Our first cohort started in October 2021, with a further 4 cohorts planned to run before the end of the academic year.

## Support for All Businesses

After a thorough review of our engagement with local organisations, we have thematically grouped our support for businesses under four headings:

- Grow Your Business - helping business leaders to understand and energise their companies for growth
- Train Your Staff - a range of short programmes aimed at providing specific skills and knowledge needed in the workplace
- Partner with Experts - engaging with our academic and research experts to diagnose and solve problems
- Work with our Students - how businesses can engage with our students to work on projects, gain work experience and provide essential and specialist additional capacity.

**Please visit our website:**

**<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/business/business-engagement/> and let us know what would be of most help to you.**





## CEO Club: A leadership less lonely?



*'Being a CEO can be a bit of a lonely place, in terms of your responsibility to your organisation, and the issues you have to deal with'*

**Giles Hughes (Chief Executive, West Oxfordshire District Council)**

Once a month a group of local Chief Executives have been meeting to support each other and to be challenged by Brookes academics.

Aimed at larger Oxfordshire organisations, the CEO Club is a peer-to-peer online action learning group for Chief Executives (or equivalent) with a limited group size of 6 members per group.

The Club aims to act like a 'high performing non-exec board giving support and challenge', that will support all members equally and confidentially.

CEO Club member, Dominic Hare (Chief Executive, Blenheim Palace) explains the need as 'when you get to the level of CEO, there is this presumption that you really know what you're doing. The reality is you're faced with a huge new set of challenges.'

The feedback on the impact of the Club has been excellent, demonstrating real influence over organisational leadership issues and decision-making. Jarl Severn (Managing Director, Owen Mumford) found being part of the group had a real impact, having explored thoughts and experimented with ideas in the

Club he 'then felt comfortable and confident going back to work and executing them.'

The expert input from Brookes, club members described as 'nonstop stimulation' and 'thought provoking' - a big thank you to our academic colleagues who took time out to spend this time to support local businesses.

Both the CEO Club and Scale Up Network have been included by the Scale Up Institute this year in their curated list of programmes for growing businesses.

**Find out more about Brookes' offer for growing businesses:** <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/business/business-engagement/grow-your-business/>

# HOW CAN THE OXFORD BROOKES BUSINESS SCHOOL HELP YOU WITH YOUR CHALLENGES?

Oxford Brookes Business School helps organisations develop and grow through research and practical support programmes, including:

- Research partnerships and Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Collaborative funding applications to Research Councils, Trusts and Foundations and Government-sponsored Knowledge Exchange Programmes
- Consultancy, where we act as independent partners providing insight and advice, based on our broad research experience and knowledge
- Bespoke training programmes, with Brookes Certification, drawing on our strengths across all business and management disciplines
- Development and support of workshops and symposia around key business development issues
- Senior Leader (MBA) Apprenticeships
- Open courses for individual participation and development

If you wish to receive information about our free programme of talks, open lectures, seminars and networking please contact **[business-research-office@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:business-research-office@brookes.ac.uk)**



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