

A satellite view of Earth at night, showing a dense network of city lights across the continents, with the dark blue of the oceans and the thin white line of the atmosphere visible.

OXFORD  
**BROOKES**  
UNIVERSITY

# RESEARCH REPORTER

2019 – 2020

## OXFORD BROOKES BUSINESS SCHOOL:

Researching current and future challenges

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# HELLO AND WELCOME...

...to this edition of Research Reporter, which enables us to share some of the latest research being undertaken at Oxford Brookes Business School.



We're keen that our research has as wide an impact as possible and feeds into debates and decision-making at all levels. We want to ensure we share our expertise and knowledge with policy makers, business leaders and the general public in the UK and beyond. Our projects are embedded in the real world, and provide insight into some of the major questions and challenges of modern life.

In this edition we highlight in particular the global reach of our work. We have established a new Research Centre on Business, Society and Global Challenges which brings together researchers from different disciplines to address core questions including what responsibilities businesses have for human rights; how to integrate refugees in the labour market of the hosting societies, and the interplay between consumption, markets and inequality. By working with international partners, and collaborating with overseas Universities, our academics are able to gather information and assess trends across the globe. For example, we've undertaken unique research with the Beijing Hospitality Institute in China, into business-use of social media when responding to crises – and how it effects potential employees. Our academics are also working in Central Asia, with the British Council and a University in Kazakhstan, fostering entrepreneurial skills needed

in the regeneration of the Silk Road trading route which connects China with Europe.

We have in-depth research projects being conducted across different continents, with researchers collecting and analysing data on new technologies, communication and the changes in how societies are organised.

As business and societies become more international in function and outlook, traditional structures of government and state are changing, and the role, rights and responsibilities of individuals are altering. Our research looks at the human challenges of life in the 21st century, including social mobility and education, entrepreneurial skills in developing countries, and issues of equality, gender and pay.

Our academic researchers and students come from across the globe – bringing dynamic international perspectives to the way we work, and the subjects and situations we think about. Our research staff are drawn from many countries. It's an international environment that enriches life for students and the wider community.

We seek to share as much of our research as possible with the academic community and wider audiences at international conferences and symposia. Our research findings are widely published in peer-reviewed international academic journals and books. In this edition of the Research Reporter we feature a book *Venice's Secret Service: Organising Intelligence in the Renaissance* which examines one of the world's earliest state intelligence organisations. We also feature an edited collection *Energy in Africa: Policy Management and Sustainability* with contributions from academics and practitioners.

This edition of Research Reporter shows something of the breadth and depth of our work and its relevance to local and national businesses and policy makers, and to academics and individuals world-wide. I hope you enjoy reading about what we do.

**PROFESSOR SIMONETTA MANFREDI**  
Associate Dean for Research and Knowledge Exchange





# HUMAN CHALLENGES

Traditional systems of social organisations are shifting. As Governments cede control of economic and social policy, the charitable sector carries greater responsibility for providing services.

The creative industries are forging new ways of communicating and collaborating. Individuals need transferrable skills and resilience to thrive in dynamic, new work environments.

Researchers at the Business School are engaged with the human challenges of the 21st Century – tracking where and how power is shifting between different social groups, and providing route-maps to enable individuals and communities to benefit from change.



## THE VALUE OF CARE

**What workers are paid in different professions reflects and perpetuates power differentials in society. In certain sectors it is easy to identify trends, and therefore tackle discrimination, but in others, issues of pay and working conditions are complex and nuanced. For example, in the UK there are more than 40,000 vacancies for nurses in the NHS – yet, despite this, nursing remains a profession which defies economic rationality since it is associated with low pay and a decrease in wages in real terms over the past decade.**

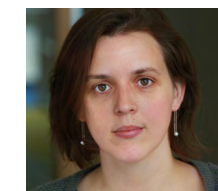
Dr Kate Clayton-Hathway, Dr Anne Laure Humbert, and Dr Sue Schutz (of the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences) have been commissioned by the Royal College of Nursing to undertake research into pay and working conditions in nursing.



Kate explains, 'Nursing has undergone rapid transformation in recent years, with the requirement for a degree and the development of skill sets which clearly demarcate it from other

health sector professions. But this 'professionalisation' has been largely unsuccessful at tackling low pay. Our research starts to unpick the factors which sit behind this.'

Many areas of the economy, including the health sector, suffer from a gender pay gap. But this research shows that this is not the problem in nursing. Low-pay in nursing is largely structural and the consequence of working hours.



'There may be historic and structural reasons for low-pay in nursing,' Anne explains, 'but recently,

nursing has undergone great change which is not reflected in pay-packets. For instance, despite the fact that nursing is now a graduate profession, there remains an ongoing tension between increasingly demanding technical skills and core values of care. 'Caring' is seen as a feminine attribute – and one that doesn't 'deserve' better pay.'

Further complications lie in the fact that the NHS is the near-sole employer of nurses in the UK, leading trends when it comes to wage-setting. The research seeks to unravel the historical, cultural and structural issues at play, analysing

data, surveys of nurses and in-depth interviews. Early results have been shared with women's groups, trade unionists, employers, campaigners and academics at a one-day event organised by the Equality Trust, to mark 50 years since the passing of the Equal Pay Act 1970.



Sue says, 'Despite half a century since legislation to ensure equal pay, some workers – in this case

nurses – are paid less than others. This research feeds into a wider debate about what we value as a society, and who we reward. Social norms and practices reflect the invisibility of women's stereotypical caring and nurturing skills, leading to institutionalised under-valuation of the profession. In short, nursing commands low pay because it combines women's work with care work.'

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## TENSIONS IN CHARITY MERGERS



**There are some two hundred thousand registered charities in the UK, and their work touches nearly every facet of life. They are a vital component of the economy and civil society - employing nearly a million people, providing direct services to those who need them, and often delivering public sector services. But in such a crowded field, it's important that charities don't duplicate services, and increase competition for limited funding.**

As in other areas of business, mergers can provide a solution, consolidating

resources, strengthening practices and bolstering identity. But the important question is - can charities continue to retain their original missions during, and after, a merger?

Charity mergers not only impact the trustees, employees, suppliers and beneficiaries of the organisations involved, but also wider communities, such as volunteers and donors. Bringing two, or more, organisations together involves combining the day-to-day management, whilst being sensitive to existing cultures, traditions and value systems. Mergers can be long drawn-out processes, including the practical challenges of combining IT and finance systems, governance, fundraising plans and Human Resources policies. They can trigger strong emotions amongst those directly involved, and with wider audiences, including those who have loyalties to the existing entities. Good leadership and

transparent, timely communication play crucial roles in ensuring success.

Dr Uma Urs of Oxford Brookes Business School, and Dr Naagush Appadu from Cass Business School, are researching the performance implications of charity mergers. Their research, with both big and small charities, will provide a detailed investigation of the challenges and opportunities that may arise during such amalgamations.

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## EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY



**Inequality, and the gaps between rich and poor, has profound effects on people's lives**

**around the world. In the UK, access to Higher Education has been seen as a tool to tackle the problems of social mobility, but research being undertaken at Oxford Brookes suggests the solution is not simply about opening the doors to more students from different backgrounds.**

7% of students entering UK universities drop out before their second year; a similar proportion repeat their first year in the same subject and institution. Both experiences are potentially costly in terms of time, money and mental health. Even for those students who graduate, final grades have an impact: failing to get a first or 2:1 makes getting a good graduate job less likely. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are at higher risk of dropping out and of

receiving below a 2:1 than their more privileged peers.

What might account for the differences by social background in these adverse university outcomes? One possibility is the different qualifications and subjects with which students arrive at university. Are some of these subjects and qualifications better preparation than others?

Dr Catherine Dilnot is leading a two year project funded by the Nuffield Foundation aiming to answer this question. Working with colleagues at University College London, she is analysing national data for all English entrants to UK universities, and detailed module outcomes from nine universities.

Catherine says, 'We aim to understand the relationships between entry qualifications and subjects, socio-economic status and university outcomes, with the hope of mitigating adverse outcomes for vulnerable students from disadvantaged backgrounds. We're also looking at systems which have been credited with widening participation, like 'applied general' qualifications, such as BTECs. Are those entering University with 'applied general' qualifications more

likely to struggle at university than their 'more academic' peers who have A levels?'

The research delves deeper still, to assess whether for those students who enter university via traditional academic routes, their A level subject choices affect outcomes. Disadvantaged students are more likely to take A level subjects which may be directly relevant to their degree course (such as law, physical education or accounting) but which are usually not required for entry. Catherine's research asks, 'Would they be better prepared for their university studies by taking core subjects like Maths or English?'

The research is important not only for students but also schools, colleges, policy makers and universities in planning interventions and pre-requisites for courses. Catherine hopes in turn that it will contribute to improving equality in society in general.

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# GLOBALISATION

Global climate change, the rise of social media, and the increasing political influence of multinational corporations show the interconnectedness of human life in the 21st Century.

Understanding globalisation, and the forces of social and economic exchange, is an urgent task if organisations and individuals are to tackle shared problems and prosper. The Business School champions an international perspective through its wide and varied research.



## A NEW GLOBAL RESEARCH CENTRE

Our global outlook is demonstrated by the launch of a new research centre: **The Research Centre for Business, Society and Global Challenges (BSGC)**, led by **Prof Juliette Koning (Director)** and **Dr Peter Lugosi (Deputy Director)**.



The Centre brings together researchers who are actively engaged with core questions in today's societies.

How can refugees be economically supported and what role does entrepreneurship play? What responsibilities do businesses have for human rights? Is tourism sustainable? What is the interplay between consumption, markets and

inequality? How can individuals and organisations ensure their security in the modern, digital world?



Our highly interdisciplinary research team collaborates with partners in such countries as Brazil, Turkey,

Indonesia, South Africa, Hong Kong and China, ensuring the Centre is well placed to address major global challenges. But it also operates 'close to home', sharing knowledge and research findings with local businesses to ensure they are able to function in a global environment.

The new centre has the ambition to offer a critical contribution to the UK government's research agendas on Global Challenges and the Industrial Strategy.

Some externally funded research projects include: Identifying pathways for refugee integration and employment

in the UK and Brazil; Maritime security and transnational organised crime in Indonesia; Sustainable consumption: understanding the taboos of eating insects; Energy issues in Africa; Researching 'invisible people' in modern slavery; Social Media and ageing, loneliness, physical wellbeing, mental health and the role of entrepreneurship in the social and economic integration of refugees to the host societies.

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## 'SORRY' – NOT JUST A WORD



**Bad stuff happens. In a dynamic and uncertain global business environment, when things**

**go wrong, swift, appropriate responses minimise damage to the reputation of companies. But there's little data on the impact of apologies in a global, 24/7 world of communication.**

Some problems, for instance environmental disasters, may be unavoidable; but others are the direct responsibility of companies. Dr Grzegorz Kapuscinski and Dr Nathan Zhang have been focusing research in this area.

'Bad news travels fast via social media and can cause irreparable harm to reputations. The key issue is how quickly and appropriately businesses take responsibility and apologise. But a 'one-size-fits-all' apology isn't sufficient. Customers need certain types of responses, investors another. Our research focuses on current

and future *employees* and how they respond to company apologies. We're interested in internal loyalties, culture and brand consistency at a time when attracting and retaining 'talent' is a determining factor in business success,' Grzegorz explains.

The uptake of social media as a communication tool has been so fast that there is a dearth of data on its impact. By using an adapted example of a 'real-life' business crisis, and social media 'apologies', the research addresses how confidence is restored, during and after a crisis.

'We took the example of cleaners at an international hotel chain who were filmed using the same cloths on glasses and toilets. The footage went viral and caused significant brand damage, sparking online outrage. By adapting the scenario and delivering different formats of apology in an experiment with University students in Beijing who were 'potential employees' we could measure how they reacted. It wasn't just the content, but also *who* was giving the apology. We tested for gender, ethnicity, style and tone in the delivery of messaging including, for example, conversational versus formal language.'

Results suggest the important interplay of tone and gender.

Greg explains, 'In essence, we found people hold social stereotypes of how men and women typically communicate, and challenging these stereotypes, using more atypical messaging, is more effective for offering apologies.'

Though in its infancy, research of this sort is vital in the dynamic environment of social media communication. The researchers hope to develop the project to consider audience characteristics.

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## REGENERATING ANCIENT TRADING ROUTES - WITH CREATIVE INDUSTRIES



**The last three decades saw a rebalancing of power and economic activity in Central Asia.**

**Kazakhstan is the largest and wealthiest of the former Soviet Bloc countries in the region, sharing borders with both Russia and China. Since independence in 1991, the country's economy has largely relied on significant oil and gas reserves but, as a historic trading hub, Kazakhstan has the opportunity to develop and diversify its economic activity. This is where Prof Levent Altinay's research comes in.**

'Just as in the UK, creative industries are burgeoning. Young, talented Kazakhs are brimming with innovative ideas which could transform the economy – from providing services like

coffee shops with social space for the elderly, to designing new mobile Apps and technologies. But, as a former Soviet country, Kazakhstan suffers from a lack of inherent entrepreneurial skills. The last few decades have been about a structural, political change in many ways – now the country needs a more granular understanding of markets, digital opportunities and entrepreneurial skills. My work addresses that.'

With the support of the British Council, Levent is conducting research into creative talent in the country, providing skill training through face-to-face and online training courses.

He explains, 'We want to provide entrepreneurs with the tools to create jobs and enhance the lives of people in the region. Previous generations were dealing with the legacy of the 20th century, Soviet thinking – we're helping the next generation embrace new ideas and ways of working.'

Working with colleagues from Birmingham University and the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National Institute in Kazakhstan, Levent has established a project (CREOTALENTS) to develop standards for creative industries in the digital sharing economy and offer

face-to-face and online training courses for entrepreneurs. The project aims to encourage policy makers to fund and support start-ups and creative ecosystems.

Other countries in the region, including Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Georgia, are taking an interest. CREOTALENTS is hosting international events for entrepreneurs to showcase ideas, with the possibility of winning enterprise awards and financial backing.

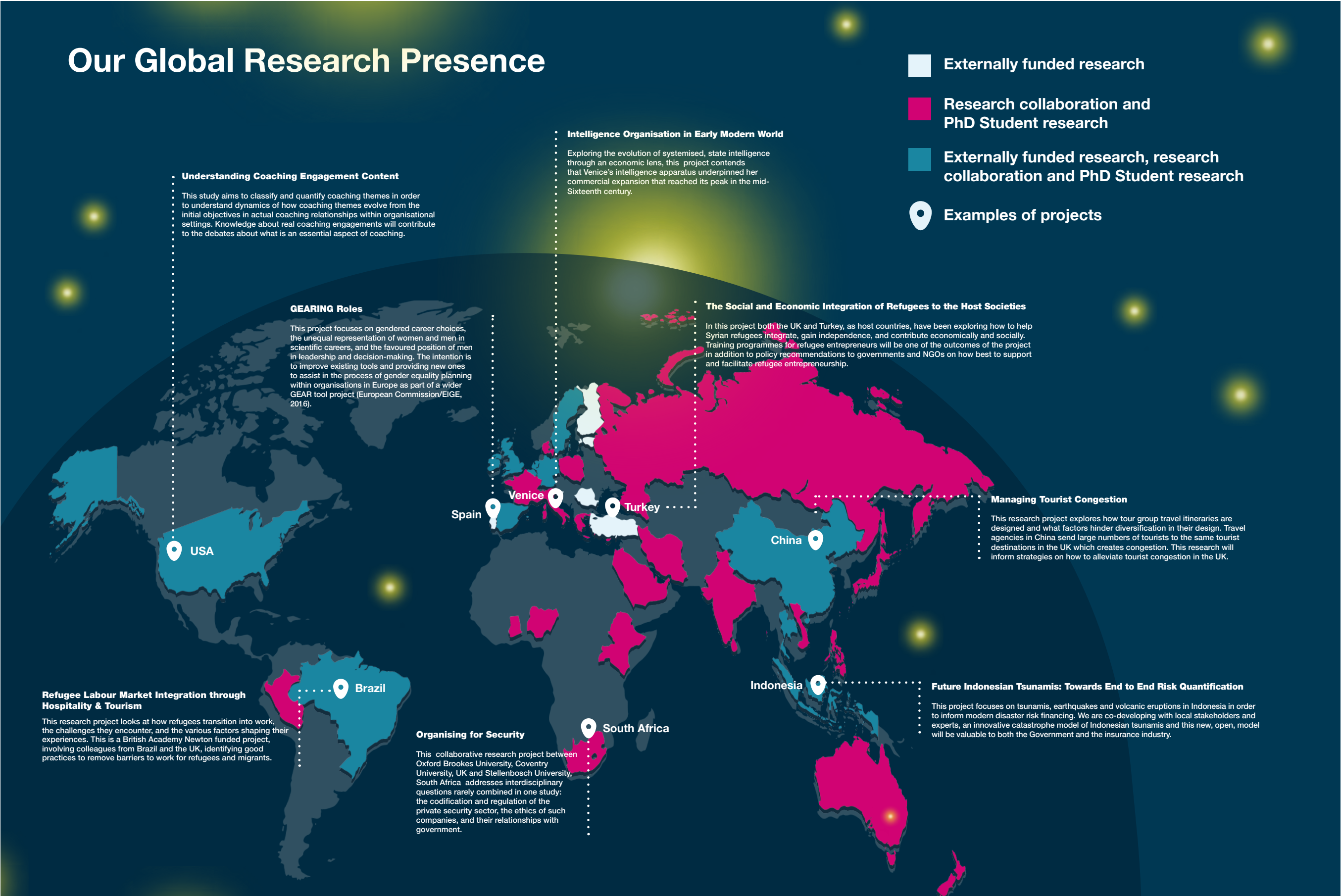
The project sits against the backdrop of the regeneration of the Silk Road, the ancient trading route from China to Europe. Now, in addition to products and materials, the former Soviet Central Asian countries can develop new routes to trade in services and creativity.

**For further details please visit the project website <https://www.creotalents.com/>**





# Our Global Research Presence





# STRATEGIC THINKING

As the pace of life increases and the demands of work, business and social life become more complex, taking a long-term view becomes vital. Researchers at Oxford Brookes look back at history to gain perspective, and project forwards to help individuals navigate the future.

Whether addressing business diversification, the application of new technologies, or individual coaching needs, our work provides strategic insight into areas of change and opportunity.



## ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND EVENT CO-CREATION



**Machines which can think for themselves – often referred to as Artificial Intelligence (AI) – promise new horizons for**

**humanity, business and society. The rapid development of computer power, data collection and software engineering, have resulted in an explosion of interest in, and hopes for, AI – eliminating mundane tasks for workers, and providing creative, enhanced experiences and services, tailored to individual needs and interests. But with the arena in its infancy, companies and investors need evidence of where and how AI provides the most satisfaction.**

Dr Nicole Ferdinand is researching how AI can be used strategically in the field of leisure and events – a sector which accounts for more than £35 billion of the UK economy and which is growing.

'Sports, leisure activities and festivals are a

massive growth area. People want experiences but they don't all want the same thing.

Artificial Intelligence offers a way of engaging with consumers and participants in new, individualised ways – and whilst we develop the technology, it's important to examine human behaviours.' To do this, Nicole joined a research team investigating AI possibilities in the field of motorcycle road racing.

'Motorcycle road racing is an exhilarating sport but, because of the vagaries of British weather, it can involve delays between races when spectators don't have much to do. We wanted to see whether, and how, AI could improve the experience.'

The project was developed as a collaboration between Ulster University and Bournemouth University and industry specialist CatoBot. It involved the use of a chatbot – an AI simulating conversations, managing a winners' contest, making photo frames for pictures and providing racing updates about the International Northwest 200 motorcycle road racing event. The Chatbot was available to use via Twitter.

The research clustered the AI users into distinct groups, depending on their attendance at the event, or whether they followed it online, and according to their knowledge and general use of social media.

Nicole explains, 'The interesting thing is that age and the users' knowledge of social media technology did not seem to affect their attitudes towards using the AI. The only thing that seemed to more positively dispose users was if they attended the event in real life, but one of our key findings was that, in the main, event attendees were resistant to enhance their event experience.'

Fergus Mackay, the Operations Director of the event said,

'Looking for fun and unique experiences for event participants is a critical event objective and the recent Twitter bot was a means by which to create and share fun experiences.'

Nicole is undertaking further research in the area, which she suggests has wide implications and applications for events more generally.

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## 'ONCE UPON A CHARITY'



**The responsibility for caring for the most vulnerable in our society is increasingly falling to the non-profit sector.**

**At a time when central funding and public donations to charities are down, there is increasing competition for scarce resources. But, there is also increasing public scrutiny of head-office spending. People want their donations to go to those in need, not to be spent on costs behind the scenes. They expect charities not to waste their money or time. So any investment charities make in communicating with their stakeholders needs to be effective. Which is where storytelling comes in.**

Since the days of sitting around a camp-fire, stories have had the power

to engage and unite. Stories are understood, shared and remembered. From an organisational perspective, stories can be seen as vehicles through which people represent themselves to others.

In the absence of physical products, charities need to develop a strong brand, to differentiate themselves and build trust in the 'invisible purchase'. In other words, stories enable people to make choices between non-profit brands with similar missions.

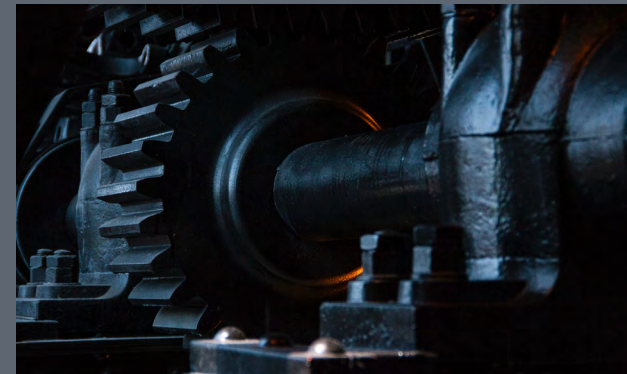
However, there is also convincing evidence that people donate time and money if charities are 'typical' – meeting audience expectations within a specific cause. Brands may survive, and win, by being 'simply better', not different. Dr Sarah-Louise Mitchell is researching the tension between these two strategic 'purposes' of brand, with funding from the Academy of Marketing.

Through her analysis, Sarah explores how stories reveal the underpinning competitive brand purpose of each charity, whether it is one of brand

typicality or brand differentiation. The research considers how charities use storytelling to demonstrate credibility and authenticity on both cause-specific and charity-generic typical dimensions. The project has a strong focus on sharing implications of the findings with the charity practitioner community.

Sarah says, 'I believe there is a huge opportunity for academic research to contribute to non-profits, who often don't have the funds to invest in understanding their stakeholders or how to strengthen their brands.'

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## LESSONS FROM HISTORY



The Brexit referendum, and preparations for the United Kingdom departure from the European Union, has ignited interest in the strengths and weaknesses of the UK in the global economy. Understanding how different sectors might perform in a post-Brexit world, has encouraged many to refer to historical examples.

Traditional economic theories of industrial decline in the UK suggest international competition from countries like Germany, Japan and the United States, accounted for much of the demise of manufacturing and heavy industry in the second half of the twentieth century. But Peiran Su's research provides more sophisticated analysis of why heavy industry might have encountered difficulties.

'It's easy for economic theories to become orthodoxies,' says Peiran, 'but by closely examining the archival data of one company which folded in the 1980s, my research shows that failure can be the result of many different factors, and not least, the failure of management to take strategic long-term views.'

Peiran's research tracks the fortunes of one engineering firm, A. F. Craig & Co. Ltd., which was based in Paisley, one of the UK's industrial heartlands. The company had a significant history of manufacturing textile machinery, oil refinery equipment and sugar machinery, and had survived economic recession and two World Wars. But it failed to survive beyond the 1980s.

'By closely examining company records, from the post-war decades, and prior to the UK's accession to the European Union, I've been able to track the strategic decisions, and mistakes, taken by the company. It's been fascinating to read all the data – including board meeting minutes – and see how and why decisions were made. The research shows how companies need to manage resources and plan for ageing, including taking account of technological developments and the possibilities for diversification.'

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## COACHING FOR CONTENT



Many organisations appreciate the strategic need to develop and nurture employees and use coaching as a tool to do this. The discipline of coaching is wide and emerging, and, consequently, academic research into the field is relatively new. Over the last two decades, research projects have tended to concentrate on two aspects: process and outcomes. But a third area, content, remains under-researched.

The coaching process happens in private, and therefore, little is known about coaching conversations. What is discussed, how do conversations evolve, and do topics match with an organisation's expectations? Professor Tatiana Bachkirova and Dr Peter Jackson secured funding from the Institute of Coaching in the USA, a major funding body in the discipline, to explore these questions.

'We want to understand how coaching conversations develop over time. The relationships and encounters are necessarily private, but could that mean that they diverge from a host, or funding, organisation's original expectations? Does the conversation go 'off-piste', and, if so, does it matter? There has to be a degree of fluidity and flexibility over what can be discussed in coaching – it is, after all, an activity intended to support the development of individuals - and humans are complex. People's needs can't be constrained – but, as a discipline, if we want to be able to measure, assess, market and use coaching as a strategic tool, it's important to understand what themes and issues arise inside coaching sessions,' Tatiana explains.

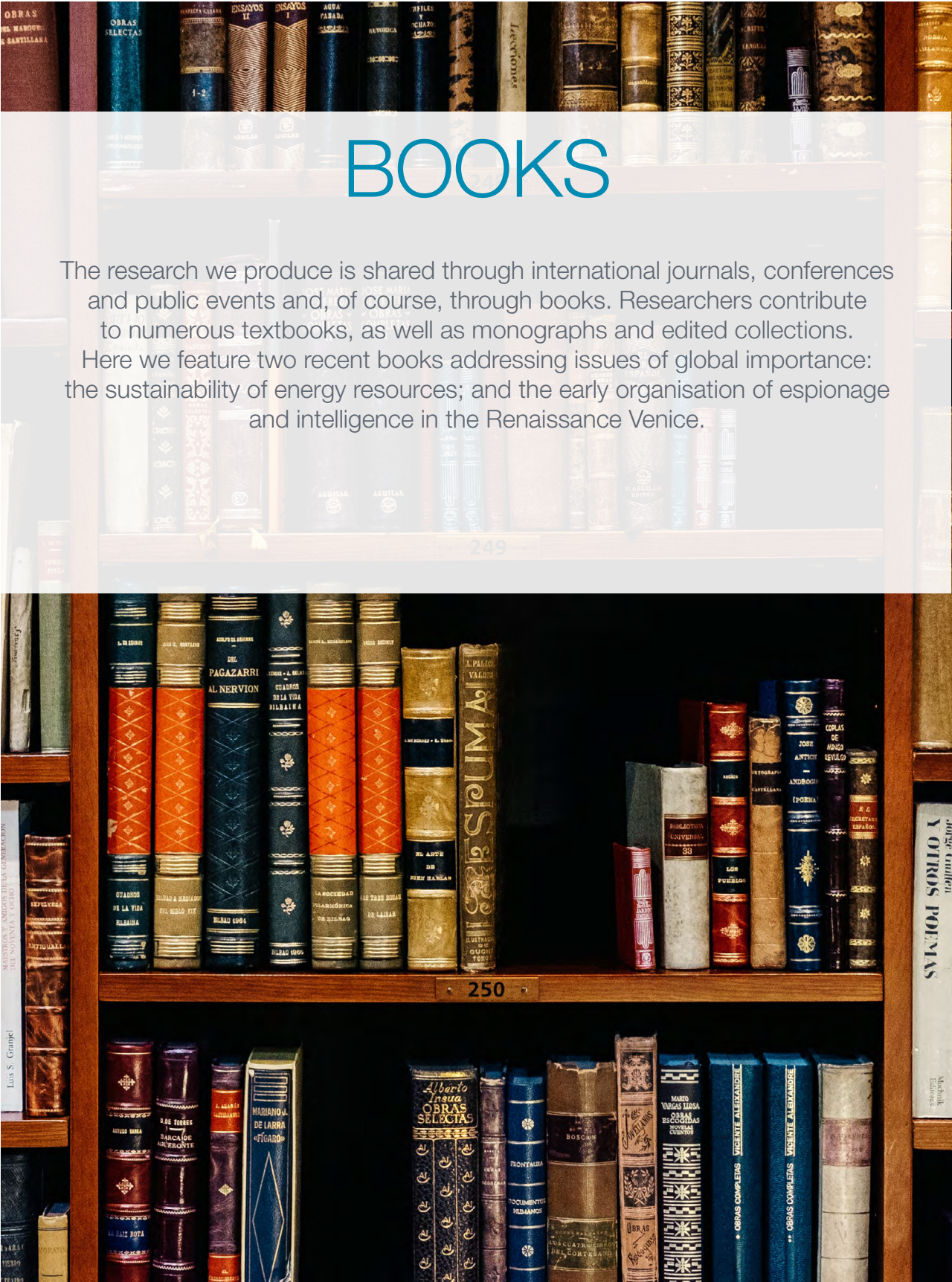
The project aims to identify patterns and classify coaching content, mapping how themes shift. The work will contribute to debate on topics in coaching, and opportunities for specialisation within the field. The research consists of qualitative surveys based on reflections of coaches on specific sessions, and the development of a website to collect quantitative data on the emerging themes.

Tatiana says, "There's plenty of evidence to show that coaching can be an effective strategic intervention for businesses – but it's still a bit of a blunt tool. This research will contribute to making coaching a much more precise implement – nuanced for organisations, providing practitioners with practical guidance around topics and most importantly, benefitting coachees, those who have the most to gain personally from the process.'

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# BOOKS

The research we produce is shared through international journals, conferences and public events and, of course, through books. Researchers contribute to numerous textbooks, as well as monographs and edited collections. Here we feature two recent books addressing issues of global importance: the sustainability of energy resources; and the early organisation of espionage and intelligence in the Renaissance Venice.



## SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IN AFRICA – FROM SCIENCE TO MANAGEMENT AND POLICY PERSPECTIVES

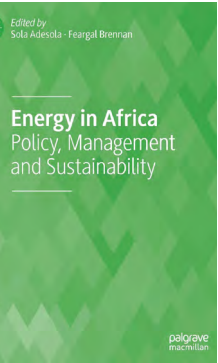


The African continent accounts for 20% of the world’s population, but decreased infant mortality and increased life expectancy, means the UN projects that the figure will rise to 40% by the end of this century. This shift requires understanding of resource distribution to ensure sustainability. Dr Sola Adesola has co-edited ‘Energy in Africa: Policy, Management and Sustainability’, a series of chapters written by scholars and practitioners, examining how the continent can ensure future energy provision.

Africa’s energy resources are not evenly distributed, and their management is key as the needs of the continent develop. Articles within the book explore diverse, but interconnected themes of management and sustainability, and examine existing problems and projects to provide evidence of potential solutions to energy shortfalls.

Topics covered are wide. What have been the effects of protectionism and nationalism on 21st century African energy policy? What lessons can be learnt from the use of cooperative solar technology in Uganda? And what are the relative merits of oil, gas, electricity, and clean technology and their impact on land contamination in the Niger Delta? Research contributions also address the role of regulators in the electricity market, and

questions around affordability and funding of energy in Sub Saharan Africa.



Contributors are drawn from across the African continent, (as well as other UK Universities) and different disciplines. The chapters provide multiple perspectives on energy management – allowing for international comparison of policy and country approach - with the aim of informing policy and practice. The book brings together academic research and management practices within the global energy sector. It seeks to foster national, regional and international cooperation in the field, with the

recognition of local needs, and the broader issue of global climate change. Business sustainability, Corporate Social Responsibility and the adoption of clean and renewable energy are also addressed, as are affordability and cost.

The book contributes to debate around urgent global issues of resources, choices and quality of life. As Africa becomes a greater force in the world, economically, politically and environmentally, how it uses resources, and the costs involved, becomes ever more important.

The collection is co-edited with Professor Feargal Brennan (University of Strathclyde).

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# VENICE'S SECRET SERVICE: ORGANISING INTELLIGENCE IN THE RENAISSANCE



According to conventional wisdom, systematised intelligence and espionage are 'modern' phenomena, spanning largely from the eve of the Great War to the present. Dr Ioanna Iordanou's book *Venice's Secret Service* confounds this view with the untold and arresting story of the world's earliest centrally organised state intelligence organisation.

Underpinned by extensive archival research conducted in Venice, Rome, Simancas, and London, *Venice's Secret Service* overturns the academic orthodoxy, recounting the surprising story of the world's earliest centrally organised state intelligence organisation, created in Renaissance Venice. Headquartered in the imposing Doge's Palace, overlooking the Venetian lagoon, and headed by the infamous Council of Ten, Renaissance Venice's intelligence service resembled a public sector institution that operated with remarkable corporate-like complexity and maturity. It served prominent intelligence functions, which included operations (intelligence and covert action), analysis, cryptography and even the development of lethal substances, such as poison.

Combining a wealth of archival sources, secondary literature and concepts from Sociology, Organisation Studies, and theories of Management, *Venice's Secret Service* details Renaissance Venice's organisation of a central intelligence service, made up of state

servants, official informants, and amateur spies. They were shipped across Europe, the Near East, and Northern Africa to conduct Venice's stealthy operations.

The book explores secrecy as a vehicle of knowledge exchange, alliances, and divisions. It also reveals Venice's fabled department of professional cryptology, and recounts some of the extraordinary measures deployed by Venetian authorities in their ongoing effort to maintain the security of the state, including torture, assassinations, and chemical warfare.

Not only does the book reveal a plethora of secrets, their keepers, and their seekers; it explores the social and managerial processes which enabled their existence and the foundation of an extraordinary intelligence organisation. The book contends the indisputable existence of organisational espionage entities and processes in the early modern era, long before contemporary terminology was coined to describe them.

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# PHD STUDENTS

With more than a hundred active Doctoral Students, Oxford Brookes Business School supports the academic skills and growth of young academics as they embark on original research. Drawn from more than twenty-five countries, PhD students contribute different perspectives on subjects which contribute to the School's international outlook. The Doctoral Research featured here shows some of their reach and ambition – from investigating European experiences of the Global economic crash of 2008, to studying commercial partnerships to reduce the international crimes of modern slavery.

## CLAUDIA MACAVEIU



Modern slavery, which includes forced and bonded labour, sexual exploitation and human trafficking, is one of the greatest forms of organised crime in the world. Measuring the true extent is problematic due to its hidden nature, and researchers believe the reported number of incidents is just the 'tip of the iceberg', with up to thirty million slavery victims trapped in the global workforce.

In the UK, the Events Industry, with over 25,000 businesses, sustains more than half a million full-time equivalent jobs. Entry level workers are expected to work long hours and offered low-pay, short-term work, and many individuals are employed on 'zero hour' contracts. In addition, the supply chain of events (construction, textile and garments, restaurants and catering services) have been identified by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as industries at risk due to highly exploitative labour practices. Events provide significant socio-economic benefits, and are growing in popularity but, with this growth comes an increased risk of exposure to modern slavery.

The United Nations (UN) advocates an approach of prevention, protection and prosecution to eradicate slavery, and in 2009 they added a 'partnership' element. Although partnerships against modern slavery are still a new area of research, an increase has been recorded in public-private and multi-agency partnerships, aimed primarily at achieving urban, economic and infrastructure development and crime prevention. Claudia Macaveiu's PhD concentrates on the increasing importance of Partnership within anti-slavery strategies. The research examines how key players share information about the nature and scale of the problem, and exchange good practice, knowledge and skills. Claudia's work addresses why different stakeholders organise into collaborative partnerships to prevent modern slavery in the UK event sector. It also includes a good-practice partnership framework to prevent modern slavery, which may be transferable to other industries.

## KONSTANTINOS SPANOS



What factors kept the economy from imploding during the financial crisis of 2008? Konstantinos Spanos's work looks at evidence from European Union (EU) countries over the period 1990–2016. The timeframe is intentionally selected so as to include the Central-Eastern and Baltic countries, which became members of the EU during this time.

The issues that led to financial crisis, and the effectiveness of the financial sector on the economy in crisis periods, remain imperfectly understood. Even though the financial crisis did not originate from Europe, it quickly spread around the globe and affected the EU economy, exposing the fragilities and gaps in the financial structure. Konstantinos' work aims to inform policy-makers and support improvements in regulatory and supervisory frameworks necessary for a sound financial system.

Konstantinos says, 'The most remarkable finding from preliminary results, is that, for two years after the crisis, the Deposit Guarantee Scheme protected depositors from a massive withdrawal of deposits, promoted the stability of the financial system and kept the economy from complete collapse.'

## JAMES BANNERMAN



Businesses are repeatedly told they need to innovate, and keep doing so, to survive and thrive. As a result, a burgeoning industry of management consultants and trainers has sprung up to service this need and help organisations unlock creative potential.

James Bannerman has been researching whether, and how, creative thinking interventions impact upon people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour at work.

He explains, 'Helping people "think outside the box" can have a significant impact upon organisations and their staff, but with so many variables, it's difficult to analyse why. I've interviewed well-known creative 'gurus', including Edward de Bono, Tony Buzan and Professor John Adair for their insights. I've also used "case studies" of creative thinking workshops with three different charities, to gather rich data on the conditions needed to make interventions of this sort work.'

The research suggests creative thinking workshops require 4 things: support from the top; reinforcement (they can't be a one-off affair); relatability so they are relevant to people's day-to-day issues; and two-way engagement.

James' key contention is that 'provocative permission', can shift people's patterns of perception.

'Workshops need both provocation and permission. 'Provocation' jolts people out of always thinking the same way; 'permission' provides the psychological safety to experiment and release the handbrakes of their minds.'

## FREDERICK YOUNG



With Brexit, the need for UK companies to develop markets beyond Europe has taken on a new urgency. Frederick Young's research offers insight into how British Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) delivering services that are the backbone of the UK economy can engage successfully in the emerging market of India.

'I've participated in international trade missions and know that SMEs can encounter real challenges when trading in countries, like India. They know they may face 'institutional voids' - cultural differences, corruption or less dependable systems of law and accountability – but they are also not sure how to navigate their way through these to build healthy, sustainable businesses, faithful to the integrity of their services. My research provides evidence and insight into the process.'

Using interviews and a focus group, including government officials, trade associations and SMEs, Frederick has found that using formal and informal networking, gift-giving, and the trading of personal favours may play a significant role. This 'relational positioning' is key to ensuring company success.

'It's fascinating, and important, to understand how individuals develop their networks in India. It's about pushing boundaries, understanding different notions of trust and learning to manage in spontaneous, unplanned ways. Often 'getting to know' individuals, in almost familial ways, really pays off. The benefits can be significant, but there are risks too. People can become 'over-embedded' or "stuck" in stagnant relationships, or need to go outside their comfort zones. I hope my research will illuminate the risks and illustrate positive routes through to work successfully in these dynamic markets.'



# WORKING WITH BUSINESS

The Business School has a dedicated Commercial Services Team to support local, regional, national and international economies access our staff skills and knowledge.

Here are some highlights of recent work.

## Economic Impact Studies

In 2018, the School commenced a 10-year programme to assess the economic impact of the Blenheim Estate. The research developed a new way of assessing the economic benefits (and costs) to communities surrounding a business, in a real-world-environment.

Following the success of the first two Blenheim reports, Dr Sara Le Roux and the team have been asked to look at the possibility of using this approach for a number of organisations, most recently completing an assessment for a prospective unique leisure and hotel development in north east Oxfordshire.

The School is currently developing proposals to take this approach in other sectors, including retail.

## Business Visitor Economy

Oxfordshire welcomes millions of visitors every year – but most stays are relatively short and the volume and type of visitors that dominate brings significant challenges for the region and the City.

Business visitors tend to stay longer and spend more, so growing this market is one of the objectives in the county's Local Industrial Strategy. Oxfordshire's Local Economic Partnership (OxLEP), the body responsible for the strategy, with other partners, asked the Business School to examine the potential for growth, and to identify barriers and solutions.

The Study involved a diverse team of academics from Oxford Brookes. They examined existing resources, and promotion, and, in response to stakeholder concerns that there was 'something missing' in the region, profiled a new multi-purpose facility that could host both large-scale business and entertainment events. This facility would enable Oxfordshire to compete globally as a business destination, whilst meeting the needs of the local community. Stakeholders are now considering next steps, developing a masterplan within the context of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 process.

## Happiness Through Goal-Setting

The Business School employs a number of academics with world-leading expertise in a wide range of specialist areas. One of these is Dr Christian Ehrlich, who could be described as one of the world's leading authorities on 'happiness'.

His extensive research includes studies of work motivation, goal setting, and subjective well-being and productivity. Keen to share his substantial findings, he has designed a set of guidance materials to help individuals examine their goals and reframe them, to improve their performance at work, and their own, and others' happiness.

Dr Ehrlich delivers workshops and has developed an online course to share the process and gather more evidence of its effectiveness. With increasing awareness of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace, "Happiness through Goal Setting" is of significant benefit to both employees and employers alike.

## Management Development and Scale-Up Support

By delivering management training programmes for a variety of clients, ranging from multinational companies to small-family run firms, Business School researchers are able to share their expertise and gain up-to-date insight into modern working practices in very different commercial environments.

For example, Business School researchers recently worked with Elsevier, an information analytics company specialising in science and health. By engaging with Business School technical expertise, Elsevier were able to access new insights into how the digital economy is impacting the publishing business. This informed the company's thinking about strategy, structure and processes, and helped to create a distinct roadmap for their future developments.

The Business School's extensive work with different and varied companies provides a robust understanding of the challenges business expansion can create. For small organisations – those employing between 10 and 30 individuals – 'scale-up', and the move from being a start-up with clear priorities to a larger operation, with greater responsibilities, can be daunting. Increased complexity and larger workforces can stretch existing leadership, time and resources. The Business School is piloting a support scheme - 'Scale-Up Pioneers' - for local organisations at this stage of development.

Please contact Commercial Services if your business might benefit from this programme.

**For further information on any of these examples of our work, or if you want to know how the Commercial Services team can help your organisation, please email: [commercialservices@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:commercialservices@brookes.ac.uk)**

# 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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