

Sussex Research Autumn Newsletter 2014

One year on

Over the last year, Sussex Research has become an established part of the university landscape. Established to help drive the research component of the University's strategic plan, Making the Future, it has enabled researchers to identify new interdisciplinary research opportunities by funding workshops; to enhance the quality of external research proposals by pump-priming proof of concept studies, and to create ambitious programmes of interdisciplinary research through major investment in research capacity. It has also been developing a more strategic approach to the university's research centres so that we both conduct and showcase our interdisciplinary research more effectively. Every school has engaged with its initiatives and I have been delighted with its progress. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Professor Alan Lester, Director of Interdisciplinary Research and the Sussex Research team for all the hard work that has brought us to this point.

Michael Davies
Deputy Vice Chancellor and PVC Research

Awards and outcomes

Strategic Competition

The first ever strategic competition for substantial investment in a research programme was initiated by Sussex Research this year. A new Sussex Humanities Lab and a Sussex Sustainability programme will both receive investment through the scheme.

Sussex Humanities Lab

Led by Professor Caroline Bassett, the Sussex Humanities Lab will be funded for 4 years from 2015. SHL will reposition Sussex at the forefront of a fundamental reinvention of the humanities as culture and society are reconfigured by digital technologies.

Sussex Sustainability

Professor Fiona Marshall will lead Sussex Sustainability, a programme enhancing understanding of sustainable development challenges and of the opportunities, barriers and processes for negotiating pathways to more sustainable futures.

Sussex Sustainability will be developed further over the next year before an anticipated launch in 2016.

Research Development Fund

Sussex Research ran two rounds of the Research Development Fund in 2013-14. The scheme is designed to develop activities enabling substantive external research proposals.

The first round received 44 bids from faculty in all 12 schools. There was a 20% success rate with the successful



bids coming from BSMS, English, Global Studies, Life Sciences, MPS and MFM.

The second round of the competition received 18 bids from faculty in 10 schools. There was a 39% success rate with the successful bids coming from ESW, Engineering and Informatics, Global Studies and Life Sciences.

In total Sussex Research has awarded just over £240k to 16 projects.

A complete list of RDF awards is available at sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/sussexresearch/rdf/rdfawarded



RM Phillips Endowment Fund

The RM Phillips Endowment was released to the University in 1997 for the “promotion of research and teaching concerned with the education of blind and partially sighted children”.

Sussex Research ran an open competition in January 2014. Funds were awarded to Professor Jane Oakhill, Professor Jamie Ward and Professor Peter Cheng to undertake research in three distinct areas.

Oakhill, Ward and Cheng have formed the RM Phillips Research Network: Improving the Education of the Visually-impaired.

The Network will investigate the problems that blind children have with understanding information and the way it is typically represented in the sighted world (including via text and images). The Network will explore how new technology can be developed to address these limitations in educational settings and beyond. All partners in the network share a common approach of using knowledge and theories of cognition to inform the research agenda but bring expertise from different areas including language comprehension (Oakhill), multi-sensory perception (Ward), and information visualisation (Cheng).

Research Networking Fund

The RNF has funded 24 projects from 10 Schools. Activities have ranged from workshops to prepare for specific large scale external funding applications, to development of new multi-disciplinary networks within Sussex.

Some examples of RNF funded activities include:

Maya Unnithan, Global Studies

Funds were requested to establish a Reproduction, Health and Technologies Network which will bring together a cross-section of Sussex academics working on sexual reproductive health issues with stakeholders in reproductive health research, practice and policy.

Janet Boddy, ESW

Funds were used to host a multi-partner proposal development meeting, which resulted in the submission of a Sussex-led EU Horizon 2020 bid on everyday lives and job insecurity for young people with a public care background.

Barry Garraway, MPS

Networking within Sussex and with other HEIs before the launch of a significant EPSRC funding call for Quantum Technology Hubs. This led to Sussex’s involvement in three multi-institution bids, all of which passed through to the second stage of the competition. The final funding decision is pending.

A full list of RNF awards is available at sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/sussexresearch/rof/awards

Recategorisation of the University’s Research Centres

In August 2013, all Directors of the University’s Research Centres and Groups were asked to self-select from three new categories:

Research Group / Network Research Centre University Research Centre

The aim of the recategorisation process was to streamline the University’s 86 centres into three clearly defined groups. The self-selection process, together with some subsequent negotiation, resulted in 9 University Research Centres, 33 Research Centres and 37 Research Groups/ Networks.

A fourth category of research centre has also now been established. Regional Research Centres are interdisciplinary groupings undertaking regionally-based research that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour and that has very considerable impacts. They host research-led undergraduate

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and postgraduate teaching programmes, which enable our students to develop regional expertise; and they assist the University’s international strategy of engagement with the regions themselves.

Two Regional Research Centres were established this year:

Sussex Africa Centre Sussex Centre for American Studies

In addition to this, a number of new Research Centres were also established:

Centre for Creative and Critical Thought

Sussex Addiction Research and Intervention Centre (SARIC)

Centre for Cultures of Reproduction, Technologies and Health

Wellcome Trust Brighton and Sussex Centre for Global Health Research

sussex.ac.uk/research/about/groups



University of Sussex Drama Students performing at the Natural History Museum for Universities Week 2014

Research Centres Directors Network

Sussex Research held the first meeting of the University's research centre directors in June. The aim of the meeting, attended by 45 members of faculty representing 35 centres plus research development colleagues, was to discuss the role that research centres play in the University and to share good practice.

Presentations on how centres could be used more strategically were given by:

Dr Vinita Damodaran, Centre for World Environmental History

Professor Anil Seth, Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science

Professor Peter Newell, Centre for Global Political Economy

Break-out groups then discussed the challenges of running a research centre and possible solutions, appropriate review processes, cross-cutting research themes and potential collaborations. Professor Michael Davies, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and Professor Lester will take forward a number of ideas that were agreed upon at the final feedback session. A Study Direct site to enable research centre directors to share best practice has already been set up.

The second Research Centre Directors Network meeting will be held in December.

Universities Week 2014

Sussex Research supported Sussex's involvement in Universities Week 2014 at the Natural History Museum. During Universities Week a number

of public engagement activities took place across the UK, at universities, museums and galleries under the theme of Ideas for Life.

Based on Professor Matthew Dimmock's research into 16th and 17th century perceptions of foreignness, Sussex's activity took the form of a relatively unknown short play from the 16th Century. The play dramatizes the arrival of an ambassador from the Emperor of China to Queen Elizabeth I. Student actors performed in various locations across the Natural History Museum and Matthew Dimmock was on hand to answer questions and discuss his research with the audience.

More information and a film of the performance are available at sussex.ac.uk/research/about/uw/watchonline



Looking ahead

Funding available 2014-15

Research Development Fund

The Research Development Fund is designed to develop activities enabling substantive external research proposals. The scheme is intentionally flexible, recognising that different disciplines have different requirements for research development. The scheme will therefore fund activities potentially ranging from the gathering of data to support a specific funding proposal to the hosting of visiting academics, practitioners, policymakers and industrial partners to develop collaborative projects with Sussex researchers. This initiative is not intended to underwrite conference hosting, attendance or dissemination, nor should it be used as a bridging fund for current staff on short-term contracts.

Projects would normally be expected to run for a maximum of 12 months. Applicants can apply for projects ranging from £5k - £50K. Funds could be used for example to support lab based work, work related to clinical trials, archival research, literature searches, scoping activities, or web based research.

Deadline: 10 November 2014

www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/sussexresearch/rdf

Research Opportunities Fund

The Research Opportunities Fund is replacing the Research Networking Fund and is designed to provide initial funds for faculty to stimulate new interdisciplinary ideas, themes and synergies. It will provide support for 'blue skies' thinking amongst researchers from different disciplines within Sussex and potentially with key external collaborators.

Activities could take the form of research development workshops on a one-off or programmatic basis, visits to or from key collaborators, research centre collaborations and the preparation of large external grant applications.

The activities that the fund supports are expected to initiate a programme of research leading to substantive joint funding proposals and publications enhancing Sussex's research reputation and driving up research income.

The maximum amount that can be applied for is £2,000.

Requests for funds may be submitted at any time.

www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/sussexresearch/rof