

RESEARCH MATTERS

Celebrating research success and opportunities at the University of Wolverhampton

ISSUE 6

University researcher receives MBE for outstanding contribution

Dr Opinderjit Kaur Takhar has been awarded an MBE in the Birthday and New Year Honours List 2018 for her contribution to the Sikh community, including her outstanding research work.

Dr Takhar, Director of the recently launched Centre for Sikh and Panjabi Studies, undertakes a variety of research specialising in matters relating to Sikh society and has presented her work in universities across the world.

She said: "It is great to be recognised in this way. The majority of my work is focused on outreach and making an impact on the community that I study. The research I undertake examines the challenges and issues that face faith communities locally and nationally.

"I am committed to bringing faith communities together, whilst at the same time raising the profile of the Sikh community. It is essential that we all make a valid contribution to promoting equality and diversity and I hope that my research is enriching the lives of our students as well as our communities."

A Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, Dr Takhar is also an Editorial Board member for *The Journal of Understanding Sikhism* in Canada, on the editorial board of the *Sikh Formations* journal, and on the



Steering Committee of the Special Interest Group on Teaching Religions of South Asia. She is also a board member of the Interfaith Wolverhampton Network.

Her 2005 book, *Sikh Identity*, is used as a key text in universities across the world and she has regularly contributed to the British Sikh Report, as well as the UK Sikh Survey. She is also one of the authors of the Sikh Manifesto, produced by the Sikh Network (UK) in preparation for the 2015 British Parliament elections.

Professor Geoff Layer, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Wolverhampton, said: "On behalf of everyone at the University of Wolverhampton, I would like to congratulate Opinderjit on this prestigious and very well-deserved honour.

"Engaging tirelessly with local, regional, national and international community groups and governing bodies, Dr Takhar is consistently raising awareness of issues that affect the Sikh community in the UK and abroad.

"The West Midlands has a large and well-established Sikh community as well as people from all faiths and none. Dr Takhar's research, combined with her personal high profile, is consistently having an impact on people's lives by bringing communities together as well as helping to raise the profile of the University."

Dr Takhar, who is also a senior lecturer in Religious Studies, will receive the MBE later this year at a ceremony being held at Buckingham Palace.

EDITOR'S WELCOME

I am very proud of our thriving research community and the important work being undertaken. In the second edition of *Research Matters* this year, we once again celebrate the research achievements of our staff, including an MBE award, national recognition for legal academics and the launch of a brand new institute.

I also want to use this opportunity to talk about two Concordats that we as a University are part of – the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity. Our efforts to support our researchers at all stages of their careers have been recognised by the European Commission's HR Excellence in Research Award, and we gained re-accreditation in 2016. A newly established sub-committee of the University Research Co. is driving this work forward, and amongst other initiatives, we plan to expand our successful Early Researcher Award Scheme (ERAS) programme. If you have ideas and suggestions to help us develop this work, please contact your faculty rep on this committee or email me directly.

As a signatory to the UK's Concordat to Support Research Integrity, we have developed robust procedures to embed research integrity into our research practices. Our Annual Research Conference 2018 was themed 'Responsible Research' and we heard from external speakers as well as our own staff about issues such as open research, research ethics, the impact of our research as well as consequences of rankings. These are important debates to reflect on, and we welcome your input and involvement.

Professor Silke Machold,
Dean of Research



ERAS FELLOWS UPDATE

After 30-plus applications were submitted for our new ERAS Fellows for 2018/19, awards have been made to the following researchers.

Researcher	Faculty / Institute	Research topic
Ahmad Baroutaji	Faculty of Science and Engineering (FSE)	Crush and energy absorption behaviour of SLM manufactured thin-walled structure with a functionally graded thickness.
Daisy Black	Faculty of Arts (FoA)	Play time: temporality, gender and conflict in medieval religious drama.
Marina Bock	FSE	Developing guidelines for aluminium in off-site manufacturers' prefabricated buildings.
Angela Clifford	Faculty of Education, Health and Wellbeing (FEHW)	Help-seeking among family caregivers to people showing early signs of dementia – a preliminary qualitative study.
Shashank Gupta	FSE	Analysis and design of low shape memory alloy to improve resilience of civil engineering structures.
Jichun Li	FSE	Modelling ultrasonic probes-connective tissue interaction on a phantom foot model using advanced finite element method and vibration analysis towards better shockwave therapy of plantar fasciitis.
Lisa Orchard	FEHW	Breastfeeding intention and the role of social media.
Samuel Salia	Faculty of Social Sciences	Reaching the hard to reach; providing bottom of the pyramid entrepreneurs access to bank finance through the building of a credit score tool.
Maria Urbina	FoA	Reporting migration in global south. Nationalism and race in Chilean social media.
Marcos Zampieri	Research Institute in Information and Language Processing	Identifying and categorizing offensive language in social media.

NEW INSTITUTE TO HELP TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES



The University of Wolverhampton has officially launched a new research institute to tackle social welfare issues in the community.

The Institute for Community Research and Development (ICRD) includes a team of experts working on projects to transform lives and increase social

mobility. Projects include work to tackle issues such as domestic violence, housing problems and rehabilitation.

A special launch event featured guest speaker Lynsey Hanley, an author and cultural commentator, and was well attended by guests from local councils and charities, as well as community workers and third sector organisations.

Professor Laura Caulfield, founding chair of the Institute, said: "ICRD undertakes pioneering community development studies to improve the lives of individuals in the region, working with our partnership networks to champion for change.

"The research and projects undertaken will influence policy and practice and create opportunities for positive change."



Project seeks to improve food security in China

Researchers have made a breakthrough in their bid to tackle rice blast fungus – the disease which has the largest effect on global rice yields.

Each year, up to 30 per cent of global losses of rice, enough to feed millions of people, are caused by blast fungus, which is therefore regarded as a major threat to global food security.

The University of Wolverhampton is collaborating with academic staff based at Yunnan Agricultural University, P.R. China (YAU), to study the disease and scientists have discovered a protein which boosts the crop's defences against blast fungus and other plant pathogens.

Dr Timothy Baldwin, Reader in Plant Cell Biology at the University, in collaboration with Professor Li Chengyun (YAU), has identified a membrane – associated glycoprotein – that appears to play an important role in the innate immune response of rice to infection with blast fungus.

They are conducting an in-depth investigation of the molecular mechanism by which blast fungus infects rice in a number of cultivars (cultivated varieties) that are either susceptible or resistant to infection.

Dr Baldwin said: "These findings are very exciting; anything which could potentially reduce the effects of this fungus on rice yields could have a major impact on food security in China and elsewhere where rice is grown."

He has recently completed the co-supervision of a PhD student (Yanli Liang) working on this project and is currently co-supervising a second research student who is continuing this work, based upon the results obtained in the initial study.

Research links fish consumption to reduced dementia risk

Professor Ruoling Chen was author and guarantor of an international study which found that people who consume little or no fish have an increased risk of dementia.

The study of nearly 7,000 participants aged over 60 in six provinces in China reveals that people who consumed fish over the past two years have a significantly reduced risk of dementia by 27 per cent.

Previous studies on the association of fish consumption with dementia are predominantly from high-income countries and showed inconsistent findings. This six-province study in

China, the largest low and middle income country, was conducted to find a significant link.

In addition, scientists analysed previous studies for a comprehensive meta-analysis with a total of 3,139 dementia cases including all from high-income countries. They confirmed that consuming fish led to an approximate 20 per cent reduction in the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

The study, published in *Public Health Nutrition*, was a collaboration between scientists at the University of Wolverhampton, Guangzhou and Guangdong Medical Universities, China, along with colleagues from the Universities of London and Manchester, the UK and the National Institutes of Health, USA.

Professor Chen, Lead of Global Health and Epidemiology at the University of Wolverhampton, said: "There is no known cure for dementia, and thus more efforts have been made to investigate the aetiology of dementia for prevention. We are recommending that people increase their level of fish consumption to reduce the burden of dementia globally."



Find out more about our research at: wlv.ac.uk/research



Researchers in Brussels for collaborations

University of Wolverhampton researchers were present in Brussels recently to develop collaborations that further their research, coinciding with the launch of the new European research programme, Horizon-Europe.

With the current Horizon 2020 European research funding programme in place until 2020, the UK has been told that they can still have some involvement should the new £100 billion proposal go through, irrespective of ongoing Brexit negotiations.

The new proposals were outlined by Michel Barnier, the European Commission's Chief Negotiator in the EU's Parliament chambers. Researchers heard that while there is likely to be a reduced level of influence for the UK in the Horizon-Europe programme after Brexit, the outline plans offered encouragement that there will still be access to funding, particularly for collaborative research that has an impact.

The new Horizon-Europe proposals will now be negotiated with the European Parliament and European Council.

The University of Wolverhampton has an office in Brussels with the aim of assisting senior management and academic staff in the generation of collaborative research and innovative ideas to improve their access to EU markets.

LAW RESEARCHERS MAKE NEW CVA RECOMMENDATIONS

With the support of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, insolvency and restructuring trade body R3 commissioned University legal academics to examine the success and failures of Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVAs).



The resulting report 'Company Voluntary Arrangements: Evaluating Success and Failure' has attracted national media interest and been

incorporated into a House of Commons briefing paper.

The report was produced by Professor Peter Walton and Dr Lezelle Jacobs of Wolverhampton Law School together with Chris Umfreville of Aston Law School. They reviewed the outcomes of all CVAs commenced in 2013, together with stakeholder interviews and questionnaires, to consider how to determine the success or otherwise of a CVA.

Their recommendations include a cap on CVA lengths, more time for companies to plan a CVA, clearer roles for directors

and CVA supervisors, more engagement from public sector creditors, and the introduction of standard terms.

A CVA essentially allows a company in financial difficulty to agree with creditors to repay a portion of its debts over a set period of time. The research found that 18.5 per cent of CVAs commenced in 2013 had been fully implemented, 16.5 per cent are still ongoing, and 65 per cent had been terminated without achieving all of their objectives.

However, the research also reveals that the early termination of a CVA does not automatically mean failure: terminated CVAs may return more money to creditors – the ultimate goal of any insolvency procedure – or otherwise be more beneficial for creditors than an administration or liquidation.

SUCCESS FOR RESEARCH CONFERENCE

The University's annual Research Conference was a huge success, with more presentations than ever from staff and students, and over 100 people attending.

Congratulations to the five poster competition winners, as selected by the judges:

1st	Brian Johnston	FSE	The biological production of eco-friendly plastics from waste plastics for novel applications.
2nd	Craig Corrigan	FEHW	An action research study with a sports themed employability charity: how can Sport4Life greater evidence their social impact?
3rd	Noor Alantary	FSE	Developing an ex vivo model of Acanthamoeba keratitis.
4th	Pablo Perez	FSE	The impact of corporate manslaughter legislation on SMEs in the UK construction industry.
5th	Maggie Trela	FSE	The potential role of human endogenous retrovirus HERV-K10 in the pathogenesis of rheumatoid arthritis via molecular mimicry and the effect of autoantigen citrullination on rheumatoid factor reactivity.

Peer review winners of the poster competition, as voted by visitors to the conference, were: Bushrah Banaris (FEHW) for visual impact; Brian Johnston (FSE) for importance to society; and Anna Borzenkova (FoA) for clarity of message.

Meanwhile, winners of the Doctoral Depictions photo competition, all from FEHW, were: Ngozika Jane Hemuka (winner); Sarah Bruce (runner-up); and Fatima Jorge (public vote).

Find out more about our research at: wlv.ac.uk/research