

WSA /

RESEARCH



COMMUNITY

QUÉ /

# WSA RESEARCH & ENTERPRISE COMMUNIQUE

Following a highly successful REF outcome for the School, the development of new cognate subject-level departments, alongside the official announcement for University investment in our estate and a burgeoning staff roster, there has arguably never been a better time for research and enterprise at the School, and with tremendous potential as we expand and build further.

As our ambitions grow there is evermore need to hold together a coherent strategy, one that genuinely supports the professional development of all colleagues; that fosters synergies and collaborations; and ensures a richly layered 'ecosystem' of research, education and enterprise.

In support of the School's current plans and development, the following is an update on three key pieces of work: (1) Visual Language and digital infrastructure; (2) Research Labs; (3) Enterprise strategy and 'Exchange' platform.

While settling into our new departments, there have been a number of colleagues working hard (often behind the scenes) to help shape and galvanise a new approach to research and enterprise. We have our new Departmental Heads of Research, Yuanyuan Yin (Design), Kai Yang (Fashion & Textiles), and Ryan Bishop (Art, Media & Technology). Heads of Research are our first point of call when thinking about developing, furthering, sharing and engaging with research. Also, Amanda Bragg-Mollison and Seth Giddings are our new co-leads for Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise, who have been working quickly to fashion a new integrated strategy for enterprise at the School (more of which below). We continue to have a vibrant Doctoral programme, under the directorship of Jo Turney, complementing our wider research environment, and which now includes the development of strategic Research Labs (more below).

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Deputy Head of School, Research  
WSA

## CONTENTS:

- (1)  
A NEW VISUAL  
LANGUAGE
- (2)  
RESEARCH  
LABS
- (3)  
ENTERPRISE  
STRATEGY

Various draft examples of the new design work are shown here. Feel free to offer any thoughts and comments, via email: [s.manghani@soton.ac.uk](mailto:s.manghani@soton.ac.uk)



# (1) A NEW VISUAL LANGUAGE

As part of the University of Southampton, WSA is required to adhere to certain underlying brand principles, through which we gain from the University's strong international reputation. Nonetheless, we are situated on our own dedicated campus and as an art school we rightly want to reflect the incredible creativity and energies of our staff and students; to reflect the dynamic ways in which our subject areas shape and challenge our surrounding world. In short, we so often find ourselves saying 'we want to look (and act!) more like an art school'.

Ultimately, we must always reflect a diversity of thinking, actions and making. But, equally, we want to find a means of common ground, to ensure open and ongoing dialogue and sharing. As well as wanting to look more like an art school, another common refrain is of not knowing about all of the great things going on at the School. How can we more effectively keep in touch and celebrate the wonderful work of colleagues and students?

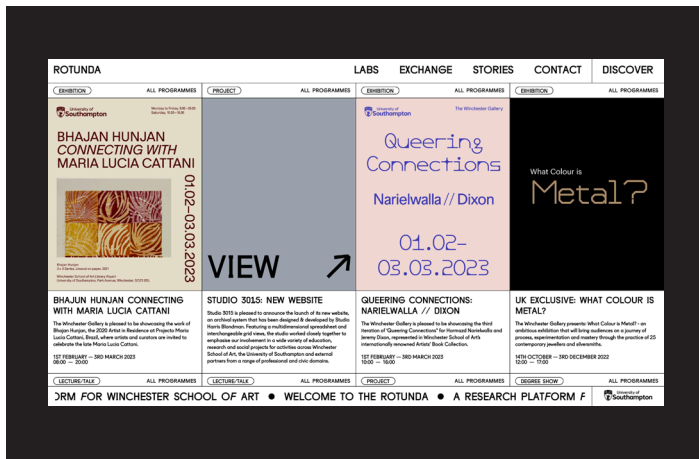
First mooted at the Summer Staff Away Day, last year, Studio 3015 has set to work building a new digital interface and platform, ROTUNDA. Developed initially as part of the School's digital research infrastructure, it will provide a central point where we can share news, events and activities. Its striking, 'revolving' design provides both a 'live' message board and also an archive of past events, projects and outcomes. In addition to the digital format (which can be viewed on public screens as well on

browsers on your computer or mobile phone), there are plans to include a regular print-based 'digest' – this PDF 'newsletter' offers a glimpse of the sort of thing we might expect. (NB. ROTUNDA will be made available direct from the School's formal website. We are currently working with iSolutions to ensure a sustainable and supported approach).

A key decision in the design work has been to adopt the use of a specific font, Fugue (as used here). This in turn has offered inspiration for a wider 'visual language' that we can start to adopt in more visually explicit ways across the campus. Studio 3015 have put together some key resources to allow all colleagues to quickly build their own assets, to help colleagues, for example, more rapidly and independently develop promotional materials for events and projects.

The new visual language will not replace the University's standard branding, signage, and wayfinding, but it will complement and, crucially, provide a more design-led approach to how we think about and use our buildings on campus. This will include new campus and building maps to help staff, students and visitors navigate the estate and give meaning to the spaces where we all work, study and socialise. You will soon start to see new vinyls appear, with the aim to dress the buildings in more vibrant ways and to begin to tell a more integrated story about our research and resources.

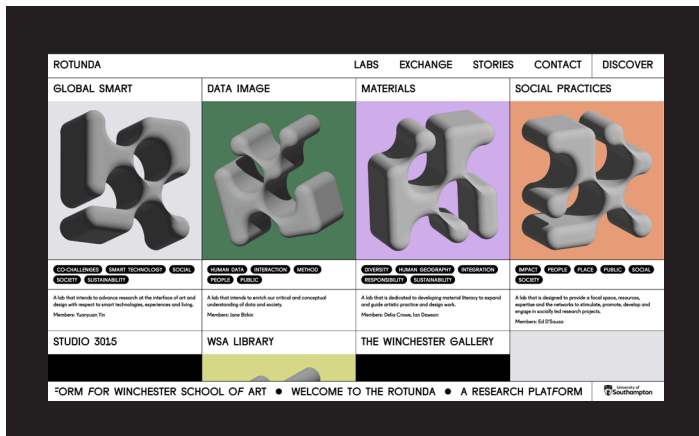
ROTUNDA, HOME PAGE



ROTUNDA BUILDING



RESEARCH LABS PAGE



WESTSIDE BUILDING



## (2) RESEARCH LABS

As has been highlighted on numerous occasions, the School has been developing a 'lab' strategy for research and enterprise (and indeed to foster the wider eco-system of research-education-enterprise). The development of which has been incorporated into the new visual language (noted above).

Studio 3015 has developed an initial visual design for the labs, which will be reflected very soon in the aforementioned plans for the campus. In addition, an exciting collaboration has been underway between Studio 3015 and a mathematician at the Alan Turing Institute, to develop a topological and generative approach to visual idents for the Labs. The idea is that a common design for the labs can be adopted, but which allows for way of morphing and transforming to reflect both dynamic activity and also the prospect of new labs in the future.

For now, the School is working on the basis of 4 labs + the Library. There has been a lot of interest in potential new labs, which is great, but for now the School's strategy is as follows: to further develop the 4 designated labs, which have been important to the successful planning of investment in our estate, and which seek to offer open, dialogic spaces for research and education, based on methodologies rather than 'membership'.

Understandably, given that the labs represent a different conceptual approach to how we wish to organise, support and undertake research (alongside the fact that Covid thwarted

our means to 'come together'), the labs have taken longer to bed-in than was hoped. Importantly, they are not 'administrative' units from which to extract resources. The opposite in fact: the aim is for Labs to act as 'fluid' holding-forms, to enable all colleagues to contribute ideas, activities and events, to enable greater engagement, sharing and showcasing. This is a somewhat complex approach, as it is an attempt to bring together suitable areas of expertise (as a lens through which the School can be viewed externally), to make greater use of our existing resources and to invest further; to blend an approach to re-thinking our physical estate and to enable wider conceptual thinking and ways of working together.

The School is currently developing the 4 labs outlined below, each with designated convenors, who, based on specific areas of interest and capacities, were tasked in the first instance to help scope the shape and feel for each lab. As we settle into the workings of the labs and how they can support the school (not least how they add to the wider project of academic renewal and development), lab convenors will rotate and crossover. The labs will inevitably evolve and likely increase in number, where, for example, we bring in further significant resources and funding.

### SOCIAL PRACTICES LAB

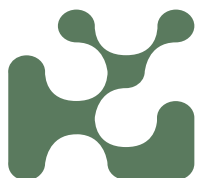
Convenor:  
Ed D'Souza



The Social Practices Lab is being developed in a period when the world seems to be changing at a faster pace than ever before. Cultural exchange is a space for conflict and resolution, climate change is real, many countries are looking inward as subsequent pandemics have limited our interactions with others and the role of civil society and social justice becomes vitally important in creating a more democratic society. The Lab seeks, then, to provide a focal space, resources, expertise and the networks to stimulate, promote, develop and engage in socially led research projects and practices that develop responses to current global and local challenges through creative practices and approaches.

### DATA IMAGE LAB

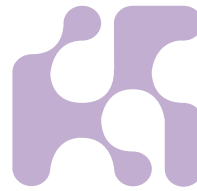
Convenors:  
Jane Birkin &  
Vanissa Wanick



The Lab is engaged in specialist research and practice relating to the production, examination and visual manifestation of data and data-art, and with their intersections with society, design, technology, sciences and enterprise. The Lab seeks to enrich our critical and conceptual understanding of data and society, facilitating and enabling interdisciplinary dialogue with a range of partners through the application of art and design research methods. Databites – a series of informal talks have been taking place this academic year to foster new dialogues and to help shape the work of the lab and its integration with the School.

### MATERIALS LAB

Convenors:  
Delia Crowe &  
Ian Dawson



The Materials Lab exemplifies the Triple Helix approach of the University, to forge interdisciplinary connections, across departments and faculties. Events in support of Sara Roberts' What is the Colour of Metal? exhibition, for example, brought together staff, students, practitioners, and researchers from across the University and beyond, creating an inclusive and diverse community of collaborators – focussing on teaching, practice and research excellence with purpose and vision. The Lab aims to be both a resource and a space to come and be curious: A place for makers and the materially-minded to explore (to question materials, materials processes and materialities alike!).

In addition to the 4 labs, the School is working closely with colleagues at the WSA Library (and the Library Service's wider senior team), to ensure we continue to champion and collaborate with what is one of the most important 'labs' at the School. Combined with development of the estate, and further development of WSA's approach and resourcing for exhibition spaces, the Library is both an vital partner and site for research and enterprise.

### GLOBAL SMART LAB

Convenors:  
Yuanyuan Yin &  
Sunil Manghani



The Lab seeks to draw together notable expertise from across the School, regarding creative computing, AR/VR and AI technology; Inclusive Design methodologies; smart service design; smart textiles; and data visualisation. It includes the physical lab for e-textiles innovation, underpinned by a large Medical Research Council grant (under the direction of Kai Yang), but also has ambitions to build out further media and computing resources (connecting, for example with the newly developing programme in Creative Computing).

As with the word 'global' in the title, this lab has a vision to work with a range of international partners, focusing, for example, on the concerns of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

# (3) ENTERPRISE STRATEGY

The University's fabled 'triple helix' of research, education and enterprise offers excellent opportunities for WSA, since the work of our brilliant colleagues and students very naturally straddle these three areas. The language around this 'triumvirate' has also had the effect of deepening the University's confidence regards Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (KEE). In turn, this has opened up access to resources and funding, such as Higher Education Innovation Funds (HEIF).

WSA is now starting to benefit from HEIF investment and notably this year we have the means for an exciting new development, the WSA Enterprise 'Exchange' – a digital platform (akin, and certainly interconnected to the aforementioned digital ROTUNDA). Co-Leads for Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise, Amanda Bragg-Mollison and Seth Giddings, have been reviewing and distilling the wide range of enterprise-related work of the School, to help fashion a more comprehensive, inclusive and joined-up approach.

WSA represents excellent energies and activities around student enterprise, which is undoubtedly a key area of the University's KEE strategy. However, there is a great deal more at stake, especially as we start to understand enterprise akin to research – whereby, for example, we begin to develop dedicated enterprise projects, which can mean drawing upon government funding, developing commercial outputs, engaging with notable

policy-makers, and working with a range of communities and social projects. In other words, alongside the vital importance of student enterprise, and obvious synergies, WSA can develop its own 'enterprise': to develop projects, tools and know-how that contribute directly to society and the economy (and in turn develop our own economy and investment in this area).

## GOING FORWARD

Over this semester, the School is able to invest in the development of 'WSA Exchange': a new platform that will give sharper focus to what we offer to external partners, clients and communities. Underpinning the development of this digital platform is the idea of 'spinning out' WSA to have its own commercial, albeit 'not-for-profit' arm. Individually, there are all manner of exciting and innovative activities going on at the School, whether in the classroom or as extra-curricula projects. However, all too often the pop-up, agile nature of our work gets snagged by necessary but beguiling financial and legal systems and protocols. The aim, then, is to develop a platform that can represent all staff and students as a collective; to provide suitable tools, knowledge and financial mechanisms to allow us to thrive in the wide array of knowledge exchange, student employability, and social and commercial enterprise.

EARLY SKETCHES/MOCK-UPS FOR THE WEB PLATFORM

