

Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund Projects 2016-17



The University's Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund is an internal grant scheme for academics and researchers to develop new Public Engagement with Research projects or improve existing activities.

The following projects were funded (ranging from £1500 to £4000) in response to the 2016-17 call for proposals; the final project summaries and lessons learnt are provided below:

Name	Department	Project Title
Dr Laura Tisdall	Faculty of History	Making History: Telling Our Own Stories
Professor Daniel Wakelin	Faculty of English	Redesigning the Medieval Book
Professor Richard Scholar	Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages	Around Storming Utopia: Islands and Identities in Crisis, 1516-2017 and Beyond...
Professor Marcus du Sautoy	Mathematical Institute	Symmetry in Sound
Dr Merrit Moore, Dr Helen Chrzanowski & Professor Ian Walmsley	Department of Physics	Zero Point Virtual Reality Outreach (ZePVRO)
Professor Phaek-Yeong Cheah & Dr Marco J Haenssgen	Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit	Advancing Realist Evaluation Approaches for Public Engagement: Health-Themed Science Theatre in Thailand
Simon Knight	Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences	Developing an Online Patient Advisory Panel for renal and transplant research in Oxford
Dr Marta Valente Pinto	Department of Paediatrics	Whooping Cough - raising awareness
Dr Mathias Czaika & Dr Marieke Van Houte	Oxford Department of International Development	CONTAINED – Evaluation, dissemination and promotion



1. Dr Laura Tisdall, Stipendiary Lecturer in History, Faculty of History

Making History: Telling Our Own Stories

This project worked with three groups of young people aged 9 to 18 in Bath to encourage them to think about history in a new way, understanding that, at least for modern historians, oral history and self-narrative work can be as important as more traditional methods of historical research such as using archives. By teaching them storytelling skills, it strengthened their ability to tell and perform their own stories, improving their presentation skills and allowing them to reflect on their own lives so far. Each two-hour workshop introduced the young people to traditional storytelling skills – through a performance and through a series of group exercises – and to the idea of ‘oral history’ before encouraging them to tell and perform their own personal stories.

This project was not intended to gather research data from the participants, but it piloted a new way of doing oral history, especially with children and adolescents. By giving them the skills to tell effective stories, it suggests that they can be enlisted as true partners in research rather than as passive interviewees. If developed along these lines, this will address current criticisms of oral history methodology by paying attention to the form, as well as the content, of life-stories, and by allowing interviewees to put forward the truths that they feel are most important.

2. Professor Daniel Wakelin, Jeremy Griffiths Professor Medieval English Palaeography, Faculty of English

Redesigning the Medieval Book

For *Redesigning the Medieval Book* the Bodleian Library invited forty contemporary artists and craftspeople, who specialise in ‘book arts’, to take part in workshops to learn about medieval English manuscripts (March 2018). The manuscripts were selected from those which were to appear in a large exhibition at the Library, *Designing English: Graphics on the Medieval Page* (December 2017 to April 2018). The Library then held a competition, in which fifty-six book artists made new works inspired by the manuscripts. Twenty-four shortlisted and winning entries were exhibited in the Library alongside the medieval exhibits of *Designing English*. Some artists also gave workshops for the wider public at the Library. Through dialogue with modern craftspeople and artists, we learnt more about medieval craft and design through practitioners’ eyes. We also encouraged contemporary creative artists to learn from and respond to medieval book design. The exhibitions of medieval and modern books side-by-side allowed us to present new and old crafts to the wider public. The modern book artists’ work proved so popular, that a second exhibition of most competition entries is now happening at the University of the West of England (April to June 2018).

Reflections:

The project has far exceeded my expectations. We initially wondered (as all organisers of such events do) whether enough people would have the time or interest to attend the workshops;



in fact, within two days of advertising, we had 140 requests to attend. We doubled the planned number of places to 40, but still could not accommodate all. (We rearranged our budget to do this and sought additional funding from a private donor.)

Then we wondered who would be committed enough to produce new work for the competition. The 56 entries exceeded our expectations in quantity and in quality. The works themselves were completely enchanting; judging the competition (with the aid of a curator and an artist-in-residence) was a pleasure – albeit difficult. The resulting exhibition looked superb and has had lively responses from visitors, in feedback to the Library and on social media. The fact that the artist themselves began organising a follow-up exhibition in Bristol is a wonderful surprise; it is pleasing to see their (and the Library's) hard work have a continued and wider effect. (I am now in discussion with colleagues elsewhere about a possible follow-on project.)

Moreover, seeing the artists' responses to the medieval manuscripts alerted us to features which would capture the imagination of other members of the public, so that we could highlight them in our display of medieval books, *Designing English*. And these new works also made me, as a medievalist, look afresh at the manuscripts I thought I knew.

Links:

Website for Bodleian display: <https://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/whatson/whats-on/upcoming-events/2017/dec/redesigning-the-medieval-book>

Website for Bristol exhibition: <http://www.bookarts.uwe.ac.uk/bodleian/>

Film covering *redesigning the Medieval Book* as well as the accompanying *Designing English*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0HS9e-ln9w>

3. Professor Richard Scholar, Professor of French and Comparative Literature, Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages

Around Storming Utopia: Islands and Identities in Crisis, 1516–2017 and Beyond..

We staged Public Engagement with Research (PER) events, in Oxford (May–June 2017) and Venice (May 2017), drawing residents of the two cities into a public discussion of ideal communities, insularity, and the actualisation of that better society sometimes called Utopia. We worked with members of the East Oxford community through the Pegasus Theatre (in conjunction with a University of Oxford Knowledge Exchange Programme led by Professor Wes Williams) to develop a theatrical show, *Storming Utopia*, which was performed in Oxford and Venice in Spring and Summer 2017. The show made contemporary, local, and theatrical sense of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) by 'mashing up' *Utopia* with Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Montaigne's essay 'On Cannibals', Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, and an original script written by the directors and members of the production. The show and its associated PER events returned to More's speech about refugees in a play part-authored by Shakespeare, *Sir Thomas More*, to ask of Oxford today: What are the laws and customs of this place? How might these be improved? What are the risks? Who may have access to the drama, and on what terms? These questions matter more than ever, today, as responses across Europe to Brexit focus on the



insularity of the UK's current sense of political identity and ask all European citizens to ask what a better European society might look like in our shared future.

Links: <http://torch.ox.ac.uk/themes/stormingutopia>

4. Professor Marcus du Sautoy, Simonyi Professor for Public Understanding of Science, Mathematical Institute

Symmetry in Sound

At the end of the eighteenth century the courts of Europe thrilled to the strange sound of a violin bow being dragged across the side of a metal plate. But it was not the sound but the shapes that were appearing in the sand scattered on the metal plate that so excited audiences. Mathematician Ernst Chladni discovered extraordinary symmetrical patterns hidden inside the strange noise of the vibrating plate.

In this twenty-first century reconstruction, we set up a network of Chladni plates driven by individual speakers to create a tessellated fusion of sound and symmetry. As well as a visual feast, the tessellating plates acted like a huge new musical instrument whose notes shift with the changing vibrations of the plates. Visitors were treated to the full range of this new instrument, alongside interactive explanations with ancient Chinese singing bowls and giant slinkies covering the history and science of the plates.

As an homage to Chladni's eighteenth century recitals, our exhibitions included staged and live Facebook performances that explained the mathematics and physics behind the emerging patterns and how it is relevant to modern issues of instrument design, quantum physics and even the theory of prime numbers.

Reflections:

The physical set-up went through several iterations in an attempt to improve their ability to withstand multiple hours of working. By the Cheltenham Science Festival, the plates were still not robust enough to last the full weekend without mishaps, but the majority survived the entire event in full working order. As a spectacle, the plates were fantastic and clearly showed the patterns the sounds made in salt.

We had originally intended to use sand, but switched to salt as this made a more visible contrast. This encrusted on the plates overnight, and had to be cleaned carefully the next morning, leading to a delayed start on the second day. Changing to a different brand of salt led to a noticeable degradation in the clarity of the patterns.

Sadly, the controls to make the plates interactive were delayed in customs and we could not make the plates as interactive as we intended. In addition the small size of the tent, compared to the footprint of the plates, would have made it difficult for more than one or two people to interact with the plates at once. We switched to displaying the full range of patterns as a



presentation and used slinkies and a Chinese singing bowl as hands-on elements instead. The bowl was lent to us by our next-door neighbours from the University of Southampton, and gave all the researchers a great opportunity to introduce themselves. The bowl worked particularly well, as it created an enhanced experience, either deepening the understanding of those who had just watched the presentation, or encouraging new people to stay and watch the next cycle.

The plates were much noisier than expected. This meant we needed to account for noise protection methods in our planning. We initially elected for disposable earplugs, but these were unpopular and caused rubbish to be left by the audience. We overcame this by sourcing a set of over-ear protectors, and the supplies to quickly clean them. The presentation was so popular on the second day we had to restrict these to the children, and return to using the in-ear ones with adults. Ordering more over-ear protectors would have been beneficial, especially as some were damaged by children over the course of the day.

Next time, we would bring more consideration to the exact conditions of the final display – the dampness and size of the tent, the variation in brands of salt – and the exact experience of the audience members – in terms of space, expectations, noise – to work forwards from what we could do, rather than aim at specific vision that was too technical for our budget and engineering capacities.

Links

Film about the project: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=-D8XIXnace0

Mathematical Institute Lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1yQEOsK4fg>

News coverage of the project at the Cheltenham Science Festival – http://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/15297233.The_sound_of_science_to_be_heard_in_Cheltenham/

5. Dr Merrit Moore, Dr Helen Chrzanowski & Professor Ian Walmsley, Department of Physics

Zero Point Virtual Reality Outreach (ZePVRO)

The Zero Point Virtual Reality Outreach (ZePVRO) project created a sensory journey combining virtual reality, motion sensing technology, powerful digital imagery, music and dance to aesthetically illuminate the mysteries of quantum physics. It pioneered the use of aesthetic virtual reality technology to integrate science and art by means of an immersive experience to stimulate curiosity and enhance education. The virtual reality (VR) video was a key addition to the live production Zero Point that premiered at the Barbican in May 2017.

Reflections:

I am amazed at how well it turned out! For quite a tight budget, our 8 min virtual reality (VR) film was presented in the main foyer at the Barbican for a full week. There were 2 headsets and often a large line of people waiting to watch (even returning to watch multiple times).



We also made a supplementary documentary film that will be available soon. This film discusses the physics concepts in more detail and gives background to the motivations behind the piece and shows behind the scene motion capture dance segments with clips of the VR rooms.

A challenge might normally be to keep all the collaborators inspired, but that was not a problem in this case. We were all super-invested in creating a beautiful enlightened piece of work.

If I had more time I would have the documentary behind-the-scenes film ready before the VR film was premiered at the Barbican so that audience members could have access to a video that explained the physics in more detail if they were interested. Also if I had more time and budget I would have a website set up which provides explanations about the physics and links to relevant sites that they can continue exploring if they are still curious.

Links

About ZePVRO: <https://qverl.herts.ac.uk/project/zero-point-vr/>

6. Professor Phaik-Yeong's Cheah & Dr Marco Haenssger, Mahidol Oxford Tropical Medicine Research Unit

Advancing Realist Evaluation Approaches for Public Engagement: Health-Themed Science Theatre in Thailand

Fishy Clouds, a puppet theatre show was created to engage communities, in particular young children, in Thailand with issues of antimicrobial resistance and research ethics. Due to the vast and varying target audience, non-verbal life size puppets were combined with live music and audience participation to create a narrative that could be understood and related to in different contexts. The story, about the proper use of antimicrobials and research consent with regard to involving children, enabled all audience members, regardless of language, to connect to the narrative and be moved by the situations and characters it presented.

Fishy Clouds ran for twelve shows during the months of November and December 2016 in schools, hospitals, theatres and health centres. The show was performed in Bangkok and in the greater Mae Sot area in the Tak district of Thailand. Approximately 1500 people watched the performance including children, scientists, theatre goers, and migrant Burmese and Karen populations.

Reflections:

With the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, and the resulting nationwide mourning period, the initial performances of *Fishy Clouds* had to be delayed. This proved challenging to cancel and reschedule these performances, and in fact meant that a key show at a festival was missed.



Because the audiences included Thai, English, Burmese and Karen speaking people, we had to have four different versions of the feedback forms which was a logistical challenge and required the help of many translators. Interviews also required translation, as they were being conducted and afterwards for analysis.

The play itself was visually strong but in early conversations with audience members there was a feeling that the narrative could have been challenging for some viewers to understand. In response to this, a very basic synopsis was created in Thai, English, Burmese and Karen and was distributed with the leaflet at the start of each show.

Since *Fishy Clouds* was a pilot project we anticipated challenges from the start, and hence had to have a flexible and adaptive approach. We learnt very early in the project that to get the best results we would have to continually evaluate best practice after each performance and thus treated each new show and each new audience with fresh eyes. There was no 'one hat that fits all'. We had a strong team of translators, evaluators, data managers, producers and artists who worked efficiently, and at short notice to mobilise any new resources we thought necessary such as printing and translations.

The results of our evaluation will inform our next engagement project particularly pertaining to the use of theatre.

Links

<https://mesh.tghn.org/articles/project-report-fishy-clouds/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T9LkG_qi9IE

<http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/1143085/>

7. Simon Knight, Senior Clinical Research Fellow, Nuffield Department of Surgical Sciences

Developing an Online Patient Advisory panel for renal and transplant research in Oxford

Renal and transplant patients have chronic health conditions that require ongoing care over many years. There is a lot of research activity undertaken in the field both in Oxford and elsewhere. We wanted to ensure that this activity represents patients' needs, and is accessible to as many patients as possible. We have developed an online patient advisory panel, and we hope to involve as many interested patients as possible to provide us with a patient perspective on upcoming research projects and patient materials. The panel is accessible to all renal and transplant researchers and clinicians in Oxford with ideas for new research projects. All renal and transplant patients from Oxford or its peripheral clinics are invited to participate. In the future, the online portal will also allow us to inform patients and the public of ongoing research projects within our units, and to disseminate the results of our research to a wider audience.



final project by the students, as a summary of the knowledge acquired during the workshops, had a very positive impact in our team as well in the students. This activity had another indirect objective, which was to deliver a message on altruism. In each school the best two projects were awarded with a book voucher (£125), with the objective of the awarded student(s) to select and donate in their personal names the books for the school library. This allowed the students to leave a legacy in school, but allowed all the school students to benefit from the prize.

This approach encouraged engagement with the activity in a very positive manner and would be suggested to be used in future projects.

One of the objectives that wasn't achieved was the involvement in the workshop of the parents of the students/families. In order to achieve all the workshop objectives it was agreed between the team and the schools that the workshops should be provided during the school lessons, as part of the curriculum. This prevented the participation of the families. In order to allow participation of other family members, we would have needed to provide a different type of session that would be shorter and based in the community rather than school. This was not designed or planned within the remit of this grant. In order to broaden the reach of the public engagement work to family members we provided leaflets to the schools summarising the project to be distributed between the parents/families.

The main challenge that we faced in the project was during the phase of school recruitment. Our first strategy was to send an email with a brief explanation of the project and a leaflet to several schools in the region. The number of positive replies was extremely low. In order to overcome this issue, we targeted a reference teacher/headmaster of specific schools that in the past participated in the projects of the research group and/or had knowledge of the work that is developed at the Oxford Vaccine Group, including public engagement. After a formal presentation of the project to the targeted schools, the project was very well received and all showed interest in participating.

For future projects the team note that active use of social media and advertising delivered directly to schools, like posters, should be strongly considered.

9. [Dr Mathias Czaika \(Professor for Migration and Globalisation\) for & Dr Marieke Van Houte \(Research Fellow\), Oxford Department of International Development](#)

CONTAINED – Evaluation, dissemination and promotion

The CONTAINED Project connects experience, research and creative learning to contribute to a wider dialogue and greater understanding about migration. The project began in 2016 as a collaboration between researcher Marieke van Houte of the International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford and Anja Meinhardt of physical theatre company Justice in Motion. Together they have developed and piloted a trilogy of immersive, physical and participatory performances and creative learning tools that reflect research findings.

The Public Engagement with Research Seed Fund allowed us to do a thorough evaluation of this



pilot project, to disseminate its outcomes and to promote the next phase. The goals of the activities were as follows: to take stock of lessons learned and take them with us into the next phases of CONTAINED by producing an in-depth and publicly available evaluation report; to share these lessons and at the same time promote and disseminate our project to a wider audience by producing audio-visual material, and to write up an academic article based on the evaluation data and analysis.

Reflections

We aimed, first, to evaluate the outcomes of the project, leading to a written evaluation report that would be published online on the project's website: [contained-project.com](http://www.contained-project.com).

We wrote the report as planned, based on the evaluations that we had done throughout the year. We discovered that a simple pdf-style report would not do justice to the wealth of audiovisual material that we had produced over time. Therefore, we decided to spend some of our own budget to let a web-designer design a separate webpage for the report, which turned out to be a stunning audiovisual document: <http://www.contained-project.com/pilot2016>

Second, the evaluation report would be the basis of a peer-reviewed academic publication on the use of theatrical tools to communicate about migration with wider audiences.

A draft of the academic paper is now ready. It has been presented at three academic seminars (in London, Oxford and Amsterdam), and one international academic conference (in Rotterdam). It will be presented again at an international conference in the fall of 2017. Next step is to revise the paper based on feedback received and to submit it to a peer-reviewed journal.

Third, we would commission a film maker to produce a short trailer summarizing the goals and outcomes of the project so far.

We decided that there was a risk that the video trailer would become merely a video version of the written report. Instead, we asked the film maker to produce short trailers that captured the images and the atmosphere of each of the performances. They are embedded in the written online report, and were moreover disseminated via Facebook and on CONTAINED Project and Justice in Motions' Vimeo channels.

Links

Project report: <http://www.contained-project.com/pilot2016>



10. Texts and Teachers: English researchers for schools

This project did progress to the planning stages but was postponed due to unforeseen circumstances:

Original Summary:

This project aims to connect researchers at the University of Oxford with 'A' level teachers across the country. The demands of rapid curricular change and the needs for critical material in 'A' level study mean that teachers of English need, but do not have access to, up to date research on the texts they teach. This project will develop Early Career Researchers' understanding of the 'A' level curriculum and approaches for connecting with teachers, and bring the two sets of participants together in a one day conference held in Oxford.

