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“Encouraging a flow of top-class researchers to Surrey through the IAS workshops has been a notable success.”

### What is the key issue for Surrey now?

Surrey is now not just in competition with other UK universities for students, staff and funding, but also and increasingly with other universities globally. The Vice-Chancellor has declared his ambition for Surrey to be in the top 100 world-wide. In order to achieve this, Surrey will need to boost its research performance and its reputation. Research excellence and research reputation are closely linked (as *The Times Higher Education* world ranking, for example, recognises: their indicator of research performance is based on research volume, income and reputation, the latter derived from a survey of more than 16,000 academics worldwide). While increasing the quality of our research will enhance our reputation, it works the other way around too. The better our reputation, the more we shall be able to attract the best researchers, be invited to participate in the best research partnerships, and join the best research networks and conferences.

### So how can we boost our research reputation?

It can't be done by marketing alone in conventional ways. But what we can do is encourage a flow of international scholars to visit, enjoy their stay at Surrey, leave behind excellent ideas and innovations, and take back to their home universities a favourable picture of Surrey. This is the vision behind the University's Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS), which sponsors workshops on interdisciplinary topics suggested by Surrey staff at the 'cutting edge' of science, engineering, social science and the humanities.

The IAS has been providing funds for such workshops since 2004 and has supported a total of 44 since then – about five per year. Some 1,500 academics have participated from outside Surrey in these workshops, coming from over 30 countries and discussing topics ranging from quantum biology to Dickens (a complete list, with workshop summaries, can be found at [www.ias.surrey.ac.uk/past.php](http://www.ias.surrey.ac.uk/past.php)). Thus one outcome has been, as intended, a lot of visitors with high praise for what is being done at Surrey. On their return they send me comments such as: “I am writing to thank you for this wonderful opportunity you offered me to visit the University of Surrey and your group. I really enjoyed every moment of the conference and it was very informative to me and more than I expected.”

### Tangible outcomes

And there are more tangible outcomes too: the workshops in the last couple of years have resulted in over £1.5 million of new research grants from collaborations formed at the workshops, several journal articles in high-quality journals, and some of the proceedings being published as books. Workshop organisers appreciate the role that IAS has, not only in providing funds, but also in helping with the administrative arrangements and advising on how to

create a successful workshop programme. For example, Professor Dunstan Brown said: “Achieving so much in such a short timescale is very much down to the IAS contribution, allowing us to develop our research programme in a way which is likely to influence our field. Given our current workloads and commitments, it would have been very difficult to put on the workshop without the organisational help that IAS provided. The real value for us, however, was the longer term impact that we have been able to achieve from the IAS-sponsored event. I think it is important that the University appreciate this combined role of IAS in supporting the University's new initiatives and allowing established groups to push forward their research.”

### What next?

Encouraging a flow of top-class researchers to Surrey through IAS workshops has been a notable success, achieved at a very modest cost (the total expenditure by the University on the IAS is only £30,000). But we can do more. There are always many more bids for support for the annual IAS competition than we can fund. Being able to sponsor more workshops each year would be value for money in raising the University's visibility.

It has been the ambition of the IAS since it was established to have its own conference centre and associated accommodation for academic visitors. This is the approach taken by other Institutes of Advanced Study, such as at Princeton, Stanford and Harvard in the USA, ZIF in Bielefeld in Germany, Collegium Budapest, NIAS in the Netherlands, and so on. We just need a large donation from someone who would like to be linked to the advancement of science and the arts to pay for such a building.

The next IAS competition for funds to support workshops in 2013/14 closes on Friday 18 October. For information, contact the IAS Co-ordinator, Mirela Dumic: [m.dumic@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:m.dumic@surrey.ac.uk).

'In My View' is a place for colleagues to raise issues of importance to the University. Please contact [editor@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:editor@surrey.ac.uk) if you'd like to contribute.