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Northumbria researchers tackling the challenges of Covid-19

Academics at Northumbria University, Newcastle, have secured Government funding worth almost £1.2 million to conduct research in support of the UK's response to Covid-19.

The funding is part of the UK Research and Innovation ([UKRI](#)) covid-19 rapid response funding, and is for three projects to be delivered over the next 18 months, with Northumbria as a consortium lead. Northumbria has also been named as a co-investigator on a fourth project led by the University of Stirling.

All successful research bids by the University followed a rapid response call from UKRI seeking proposals to address the challenges of the global pandemic. Northumbria's work will focus on collaborative support for a wide range of stakeholders including national and local government, businesses, the police, and the voluntary sector.

Professor George Marston, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation at Northumbria, believes winning the funding from UKRI reflects the growing strength and expertise of the University's research which has already contributed significantly to the regional and national response to Covid-19. He added: "Our world-leading research is making a positive and lasting impact across society, economically, culturally and through our work on health and wellbeing. We are helping businesses innovate and grow, identifying and meeting future skill needs, and improving scenario planning, problem solving and policy making - both in response to the pandemic now and looking ahead to the future.

"There have been thousands of rapid response bids to UKRI, so to be selected as the lead on three projects and a co-investigator on another is a recognition of the quality of research at Northumbria."

UKRI works in partnership with universities, research organisations, businesses, charities, and government to create the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish.

SUCCESSFUL RESEARCH PROJECTS:

- *Mobilising Voluntary Action in the four UK jurisdictions: Learning from today, prepared for tomorrow.* Funding from the Economic and Social Research Council ([ESRC](#)). Northumbria leading, with partners. (Northumbria lead: [Professor Irene Hardill](#))

The overarching aim of this four-nation comparative study is to critically evaluate social welfare voluntary action responses to the pandemic, to help guide the UK volunteer effort to support the national recovery and preparedness for future crises, and in doing so inform UKRI research questions on inequality and national recovery. A UK-wide team composed of academics and the four key sector infrastructure bodies for each nation (England's National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), Volunteer Scotland, Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), and Northern Ireland's

Volunteer Now) have planned a four nation comparative study; with the guidance of a Project Partner advisory panel (comprising professional networks, organisations, and related ESRC investments). They are able to build on and extend the mapping and knowledge-sharing work of the four infrastructure organisations to offer insights into volunteering trends and experiences across the whole of the UK.

- *Supporting the interviewing and legal representation of crime victims and suspects using digital communication methods: It is 'remotely' possible?* Funding from ESRC. Northumbria leading, with partners. (Northumbria lead: [Professor Gavin Oxburgh](#))

During worldwide pandemics, police investigations must continue, and victims, witnesses and suspects of crime must still be interviewed. However, social distancing means that investigators are sometimes unable to conduct interviews and third-party professionals (e.g., legal professionals) are unable to communicate with clients in a traditional format. Remote communication is one way currently being conducted across the UK – but it is not standardised and the current research base to prove its efficacy is extremely limited. The Northumbria-led research team will work with national and international partners, including the National Police Chiefs Council, the College of Policing, Northumbria Police, Metropolitan Police and South Wales Police, Fair Trials, the National Appropriate Adults Network, the International Criminal Court, the Commission for International Justice and Accountability, and the Norwegian Police University College.

- *Observatory for Monitoring Data-Driven Approaches to COVID-19.* Funding from Arts and Humanities Research Council ([AHRC](#)) Northumbria leading, with partners. (Northumbria lead: [Marion Oswald](#))

OMDDAC will provide a national, public space for the consolidation of knowledge and understanding around data-driven approaches to COVID-19, focused upon legal, ethical, policy and operational challenges. Data-driven responses are being developed rapidly across the public sector, academia and industry. These include combining digital health datasets within a single dashboard, use of communications data to map trends, monitoring of quarantine behaviour by drones and automated number plate recognition, and access to Bluetooth data for contact tracing. 'OMDDAC's interdisciplinary team will collate lessons learned throughout the pandemic by way of

stakeholder interviews, case study analysis, representative public surveys and practitioner-focused guidelines.'

- *Optimising Outcomes from Procurement and Partnering for Covid-19 and Beyond: Lessons from the Crisis*. Funding from ESRC. University of Stirling leading, with Northumbria as co-investigator. Northumbria leads: ([Professor Joyce Liddle](#) and [Professor John Shutt](#))

Procurement accounts for £100bn (47%) of local authority (LA) spending (IoG,2018). Leveraging these resources to the greatest social and economic effect is now crucial in promoting an agile crisis response, maintaining community resilience and helping local businesses stay afloat. Liddle and Shutt will be examining procurement and commissioning in the North East, as a specific case within the Northern Powerhouse, as well analysing the implications for Devolution. They have the full support of the North of Tyne Combined Authority and Tees Valley Combined Authority, local authorities, relevant public and private procurement bodies/forums across the North, in addition to national and local professional associations.

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