Duke of York launches Bridge at Hughes Hall

In May we were delighted to welcome the Duke of York, Honorary Fellow, to launch The Bridge.

His Royal Highness met students to hear about college life before lunching with fellows and taking part in the launch. Anthony Freeling welcomed His Royal Highness back to Hughes Hall and highlighted the significance of the Duke’s expertise in business and innovation for the future success of The Bridge. Patrick Maxwell, Regius Professor of Physic, emphasised the importance of research communities serving society: “Academics are brilliant at turning money into knowledge but often useless at turning knowledge into money. We need diverse groups to turn new discoveries into something useful – knowledge itself is not enough.”

The Duke joined senior fellows in a dynamic, multi-disciplinary workshop session. He explored the roles of entrepreneurship and innovation in four Bridge Centres: Climate Change Engagement; 100 Healthy Years; Regulating the Digital Economy; and Oracy.

Joining the Digital Economy group, The Duke raised issues around the importance of digital platforms for entrepreneurship and how to balance this with a need for wider regulation. The group looked at how to protect consumer choice and how to turn industry best intentions into a measurable framework for change. The Oracy group explored the importance of teaching oracy skills in schools, especially in a world overwhelmed by social media, and of addressing these issues early on in primary education, through national curriculums, across state and private sectors. The climate change engagement group asked how best to engage and educate at the highest levels of global business – influencing long-term decisions taken by Board members on strategic priorities – to change policy and practice regarding climate change. Finally, the Duke discussed Hughes Hall’s 100 Healthy Years project including trend changes in disease incidence and the importance of addressing the socio-economic factors which affect life expectancy. His Royal Highness summed up his thoughts on the role of pioneers in entrepreneurship, highlighting the importance of The Bridge in making change for future generations, and his pleasure in returning to the College.

Get in touch

If you would like to play a role in the Bridge theme groups, have project ideas or would just like to find out more about our work, please email Stephen Axford: bridge.director@hughes.cam.ac.uk.
Annual Senior Members’ Symposium

This year we explored Data and Artificial Intelligence. What cutting-edge research is going on in Cambridge? What role are Hughes Hall fellows playing in our technological future? And, crucially, how do we use the breadth and depth of our collective expertise within college to develop a fourth Bridge theme?

Directors of Bridge Centres and partner organisations got the event started with overviews of their current work and a discussion of potential synergies with an AI and Data theme.

We heard from Oracy Cambridge’s Rupert Wegerif who highlighted the importance of interaction and interthinking within a dialogic education and the relevance of these to technological environments. Cambridge Digital Innovation links Hughes Hall to the Judge Business School and has well established partnerships with local, national and international initiatives in the technological innovation arena which could form a highly relevant backdrop for a new theme. The Director of Cambridge Governance Labs explored the role of technological solutions to the data collection and analysis that is central to mechanisms of good governance. We heard about the role of the PHG Foundation including their current work with relevance to data and technology: genomics analysis, public health data, digital health, and the policy requirements of new healthcare technologies. Finally, the founder of the Centre for Climate Change Engagement, Ron Zimmern, explained its multi-disciplinary approach and reliance on Hughes Hall’s expertise, external focus and partnership-brokering role for the success of future projects.

A lively panel discussion ensued exploring diverse issues from improving parental oracy skills and systematising decision-making over multi-dimensional outcomes to engaging in dialogues with unknown answers in the age of the internet, and the lack of evidence-based policy-making in Whitehall.

Hughes Hall fellows with diverse research interests in technology went on to lead two highly engaging presentation sessions which helped identify thematic commonalities and research synergies between academics in a variety of disciplines. These included the potential establishment of a centre for research into competition and regulation in the digital economy, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of such research. Two speakers addressed differing aspects of precision medicine: the legal and ethical challenges in regulating ‘black box medicine’ which uses non-transparent algorithms; and the significance of GDPR in regulating black box diagnosis including the challenge of encompassing machine learning within existing regulations. Stephen Cave and Jess Whittlestone from the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence explained their work on the ethical and social implications of AI including AI narratives and justice, and AI futures and responsibility.

Ajith Parlikad began the second session with an exploration of advances in digital manufacturing processes, particularly, changes resulting from the internet of things and the implications of ‘intelligent products’. We heard about the digitalisation of financial regulation, with a focus on the opportunities for research translation including automating decisions; data management and analytics tooling; and investigating the data lake. Next came algorithms from two different perspectives. Firstly, the need for algorithmic regulation in dynamic environments and the potential for market power imbalances within the network industry. This was followed by a comparison of deep learning with traditional algorithms and the serious analytical efforts underway to better understand how it works and its limitations.

Discussions were vibrant, identifying the potential for collaboration and impact. There is no doubt that Hughes Hall has the capability to establish a fourth theme on AI and Data. Clusters of expertise exist around market regulation, the mathematics of algorithms, and the legal status of black box medicine. Cross-cutting presentation themes included evidence-based decision-making and the nature of ethics, and there was a broad resonance for speakers in relation to healthcare data and climate change.

Content: Sarah Langford