

Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences:
Q&A with Professor Abigail Tucker, Dean for Research

Meet Professor Abigail Tucker. As the Dean for Research she has oversight of research projects in the faculty, providing the support teams need to carry out high quality research.

What's your background and what does your role involve?

Even though I work with a lot of dentists, I'm actually a biologist! I've been Dean for Research since October 2018. Before that I was the Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research.

My role involves identifying research projects that are making a real difference. Then I try to add value to help them meet their goals – whether that's freeing up their time, matching up collaborators, or providing the right equipment.

Why is the faculty name change important?

We have a wide range of research going on and the new faculty name helps encompass all the different things we do. It's telling people "actually we're really good at lots of different things" – we look at craniofacial and microbiome interactions too!

What's the benefit of King's also working with patients?

We need to ask whether patients are happy for their data to be used for research early on, then from that point onwards that information can be collected. We're talking about big data – there's a sudden availability of information which we want to take advantage of!

Do you work with other faculties within King's?

We've pretty much collaborated across the board. We have collaborations with the Faculty of Life Sciences & Medicine and the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience.

For example, we mainly look at microbiome in the mouth, but there are researchers looking at it in the gut. It's a classic example of where it is much better to work together!

What industry partners do you have?

We work with Unilever and GlaxoSmithKline – those are two of our big partners. But our researchers have also worked with PepsiCo to look into taste perception. We're also working with pharmaceutical companies to find drugs to repair hearing loss.

It's my aim to make sure we develop more industry relationships. We have a lot of expertise to offer and working together is an exciting opportunity to make an impact.

How about collaborations on a global scale?

I work with Institute of Experimental Medicine in Prague and with PUC in Santiago in Chile – but you could pick any member of staff and they'll have global networks.

The opportunity to work on a global scale frees up different funding avenues and allows us to combine expertise with different people. It also gives us the chance to share equipment and resources.

There is a lack of UK students going on to academic careers. What is the faculty doing about this?

We have a programme called Inspire run by Dr Rupert Austin – it's a UK initiative started by group of researchers who wanted to engage UK dental students. The scheme gives students the opportunity to carry out research and meet students from other universities. And there's prizes up for grabs!

For more information on the Faculty of Dentistry, Oral & Craniofacial Sciences or to republish this Q&A please contact Laura Shepherd, Communications at the Faculty on laura.2.shepherd@kcl.ac.uk