

## Medal of Honour Presentation & Dinner, Wednesday 27 April 2022

**Medallist: Shalni Arora**

**Presenter: Dr Jane Oglesby**

Shalni Arora **graduated from the University of Manchester** with an MA in International Development in 2010. We honour Shalni today as an alumna of the University who has made lasting contributions to society as an entrepreneur, humanitarian and philanthropist.

Originally from Watford – and still a passionate supporter of Watford FC – Shalni completed undergraduate and Masters degrees in Genetics at the **University of Cambridge**, Shalni trained as an accountant at **Arthur Andersen**, before holding senior positions at **AstraZeneca**. Here, she co-founded **DxS**, a personalised medicine business specialising in cancer diagnostics which she spun out from AstraZeneca and then successfully exited in 2008. She then went on to study for her Masters at Manchester, graduating in 2010. Her studies in International Development at Manchester, along with her career experiences, have directly informed her philanthropy which focusses on structural change, social justice and “disruptive philanthropy”.

Since 2011 Shalni has devoted her time to philanthropic work. She established **Savannah Wisdom**, a charitable foundation focusing on social change which has tackled issues ranging from corruption in the delivery of healthcare to better futures for women and girls at local community level in India and the UK. The foundation does this by partnering with a number of not-for-profit organisations with **innovative and radical ideas** that disrupt the traditional model for delivering change. It has funded organisations and individuals working in the fields of health and education – and focuses especially on the wellbeing of vulnerable members of society in India and the South Asian community in the UK, where support gaps are not being filled by local and government infrastructure. **During the Covid-19 crisis**, Savannah Wisdom made a donation to The Lord Mayor of Manchester’s Charity Appeal, helping to fund domestic violence organisations in Greater Manchester which saw a huge increase in demand for their services during lockdowns.

Shalni and Savannah Wisdom are supporters of **The British Asian Trust**, where Shalni is also a trustee. She is also a trustee of **Alder Hey Children’s Hospital Foundation Trust**, Liverpool, and **Belong (The Cohesion and Integration Network)**. She also manages the **B&M Community Fund**, part of the CSR division at **B&M Retail**, where her husband Simon is CEO.

Until November 2020 Shalni was a trustee of **Transparency International UK**, and a senior adviser and Chair of the Steering Committee on its Global Pharmaceutical and Healthcare Programme. She is also an Influencer within the **EdelGive Foundation’s** group of leaders and opinion-makers across different sectors who aim to advocate on behalf of marginalised women to help them participate in the social, political, and cultural spheres of society. Shalni is also a member of the **Network for Social Change**, a collective of philanthropists providing funding for progressive social change, particularly in the areas of justice, peace, and the environment.

In 2017, **Shalni became a Fellow of the Beacon Collaborative** in recognition of her philanthropic efforts. In 2021, Shalni, Savannah Wisdom, B&M Retail, HOME Manchester, and Manchester City Council launched **The Cultural Hardship Fund for Freelancers**, a £500,000 pot of funding to assist those in Manchester’s arts and cultural sectors whose freelance work has been lost or disrupted because of COVID-19. This fund won the **Best Business Partnership Award** at the Manchester Culture Awards in 2021.

Shalni’s link to this University continues through the generous donation she has made to the **South Asia Gallery at the Manchester Museum**, which will open in August 2022. This will be the first

permanent gallery in the UK to explore the histories and experiences of the South Asian diaspora in Britain, offering unprecedented opportunities for the Museum to build awareness and intercultural understanding in Manchester and beyond. Shalni has been an invaluable advocate for the Gallery project, and through her networks has been vital in raising awareness of this cause. We are very pleased to be associated with Shalni on this landmark development.

Shalni is one of those great and rare things in the world: an unalloyed force for good. President & Vice-Chancellor, we are pleased and proud to confer on her the University's Medal of Honour.