Life at the chalkface

New scheme to plug the reality gap for trainee teachers

A new initiative for the training of science teachers aims to narrow the gap between the fantasy of being a teacher with the reality of working in a classroom.

For the new school term some 50 students studying for a science Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) at Sussex will be based at the new Peacehaven Community School, which opened on 3 September. In the past, the students would have spent time studying on campus alongside their work placements.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Dr Mary Stuart (pictured left) says the benefits of the new scheme to both the students and the school will be significant. “One of the biggest problems in teacher education is the retention of staff. New teachers go into a job and find it harder than they expected. This scheme, whereby they are working in schools all the time, will give them very realistic expectations.”

The initiative, which borrows ideas from how medical schools operate in training doctors in hospitals, also involves education researchers from Sussex being based at the school to support staff in developing their professional practice.

Although this method of training teachers is well established in the United States, Mary believes Sussex is the first British university to adopt the method with its own students. “We want to see how it goes, but we see it as a potential model for the future,” she says.

The move to Peacehaven arose from the introduction of new National Curriculum targets in training secondary-school science teachers. The University wanted to develop its regional reputation as a high-quality provider of initial teacher training in a national shortage subject and identified the need for fully refurbished premises. The Peacehaven Community School, funded by the Private Finance Initiative and built by East Sussex County Council, is a modern facility with new science laboratories.

Fiona Wright, head of Peacehaven Community School, says the scheme will be of enormous benefit to her staff and pupils. “The student teachers are valuable role models for our young people in terms of showing them how they can progress in their education.”

She adds: “As a school we have placed high emphasis on research and new practice. We have worked closely with the University of Sussex and this will strengthen that link.”

Stubbing out teenage smoking

Psychologists Dr Barbara Lloyd (pictured left), from the School of Social Sciences, and her colleague Dr Kevin Lucas at the University of Brighton have spent two years on a £102,000 project, funded by the British Heart Foundation (BHF).

The result is a personality questionnaire, designed specifically for boys and girls aged 11 to 16, which aims to identify those most likely to have a puff behind the bike sheds.

It took a year to compile the questionnaire, which asks a range of questions about the kind of person the pupils are, their likes and dislikes and their background. During the period it was used, the social psychologists discovered that their predictions as to which young people were likely to take up smoking were up to 96 per cent accurate.

Barbara said it was clear that a blanket anti-smoking message did not always work and their hope is that health and education decision-makers will use the questionnaire’s findings to give specific anti-smoking advice to those pupils more at risk of developing the habit.

Assistant Medical Director of the British Heart Foundation, Dr Vivienne Press, said: “This interesting study provides important clues about identifying those young people most likely to take up smoking. We know that it’s an extremely hard habit to break and the BHF is therefore committed to finding new ways of preventing teenagers from becoming addicted to tobacco in the first place. “We also have to face the challenge of countering the effects of the tobacco industry’s marketing strategy - especially among young people - and I hope that the findings of this study will be a base for developing more effective health-promotion programmes.”
Charity calls on daredevils

The British Red Cross has put out an urgent call to all daredevils in Sussex asking for their help in raising money to support services in the community.

On Saturday 29 September the charity will be holding its annual fundraising abseil at the University of Sussex library.

"This is a really fun and safe event which will raise much-needed funds for the local British Red Cross," says fundraiser Dan Powell. "Funds raised in Sussex this year have already gone towards several vital projects including our Daily Living Centre in Hove, the Fire Victim Support unit and wheelchairs and medical equipment for the Medical Loan Service."

The abseil is free to anyone who raises sponsorship pledges of £50. All abseilers will get a certificate and a photo of their first step over the edge and there will be prizes for those who raise the most money.

Last year over 60 volunteers took the plunge from the top of Peacehaven cliffs and raised £8,000. "This is our third annual abseil and we aim to raise even more this year, so come along and test your nerve!" says Dan.

The abseil is suitable for beginners and will be run by a professional abseiling team. Anyone interested in taking part should contact Dan on (01273) 229405.

TUC General Secretary visits CDEC at Sussex

John Monks, General Secretary of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), took time out from the organisation's annual conference at the Brighton Centre this week to visit the Career Development & Employment Centre (CDEC) on campus.

Mr Monks is pictured (centre) finding out the realities of student finance from Emma Jolley, who works as a cashier at Ladbrokes bookies while studying Maths with French in SMS, and Nicole Smith, a History of Art student in EAM who works in a SEEBOARD call centre.

"Students need to know that unions are there to support them and that the best protection young people can have from exploitation at work is for them to become a member of a trade union," said Mr Monks.

A new TUC report entitled 'Reaching the Missing Millions' concludes that, despite recent growth in union membership, young people and graduates are less likely than other groups of employees to join unions. The report proposes a web-based service run in conjunction with the National Union of Students to help in the transition from college to work.

The TUC is made up of 74 unions, with a combined membership of nearly 7 million workers.

Interreg builds on existing partnership

The President of the Regional Council of Upper Normandy, M. Alain Le Vern, visited the University on 11 September as part of a two-day tour to meet the key partners in the Interreg programme in Sussex and Kent.

Interreg is a European Union funding programme that supports cross-border co-operation projects between neighbouring regions.

Interreg II involved a range of collaborative projects in Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and the French Departments of Seine-Maritime (which includes the towns of Dieppe, Le Havre and Rouen) and Somme from 1994-99.

Academics at Sussex who collaborated with their colleagues across the Channel included physical geographer Dr Cherith Moses in CPES, who worked with the University of Rouen on a study of the causes of shingle depletion on the beaches of East Sussex and Upper Normandy.

The planning for the Interreg III programme, which will run until 2006, is now well underway. The new, expanded programme will cover an enlarged area — including Kent, Medway and Nord-Pas-de-Calais — with Upper Normandy as the managing authority.

Over lunch on campus, M. Le Vern met with representatives from the Government Office for the South East (GOSE), Brighton & Hove City Council, East Sussex County Council and the University of Brighton.

The visit also included a tour of the Sussex Innovation Centre, a good example of joint local partnership in one of the themes of the new programme, 'Research and the cross-border transfer of technology'.

For more information about the Interreg programme, contact Ross Dowsett in the Research Services Division on ext. 9238, email r.l.dowsett@sussex.ac.uk.

Obituary

Brian Roberts

Professor Brian Roberts, who had been at the University for 30 years, died on 1 September at the age of 61. He was taken ill suddenly in April and had made some recovery subsequently.

Brian started as a Lecturer in Mechanical Engineering at Sussex in 1971; he then became a Reader in 1981 and Professor in 1986. He served as Chairman of Mechanical and Structural Engineering from 1985-1990, as Dean of Engineering from 1990-1996, and as a Pro-Vice-Chancellor from 1997-2000. In November 1999 he again took over the role as Dean of the (renamed) School of Engineering and Information Technology.

Brian's research, for which he was renowned worldwide, was in the areas of response of mechanical and structural systems to random excitation; modelling and identification of non-linear systems, with applications in the automotive area; dynamic behaviour of marine structures in waves; and the analysis and interpretation of random data. He was the author of two books and co-editor of three books on random vibration.

Brian served both the School and the University with great dedication in his quiet and unassuming manner, and was a great supporter of the new directions the School had identified for its future. He was a private individual who placed great emphasis on the well-being of the School.

A remembrance service will be held in the Meeting House chapel on Wednesday (19 September) at 12 noon. A tree-planting ceremony will follow the service and refreshments will be available afterwards.
For once, universities may have scored a victory. The Funding Council, the Department of Education and Skills, and Universities UK have agreed to make a radical change in the system of quality assurance. John Randall, head of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), has resigned in protest.

But we are sometimes skilled at seizing defeat from the jaws of victory, and it is too early to be complacent.

In outline, the new proposal effectively abolishes subject review, the automatic inspection of each subject. Each university will be subject to periodic institutional review of quality assurance. Institutional review will focus on examining the university's own procedures for course approval, periodic review, external examining and so on, with some sampling of how these procedures actually work in one or two subjects, and with more detailed scrutiny of any aspect of provision where the review shows there is cause for concern. This is a much more sensible approach than the current QAA system and it should be much less bureaucratic.

There are three ways that it could go wrong. The first would be for us to heave a sigh of relief that the QAA has been tamed, and forget about the whole business of quality assurance. That would be a mistake. Students and employers are entitled to know that universities take quality and standards seriously, that we think carefully about the structure and content of courses and degree programmes, systematically collect and pay attention to student feedback and drop-out rates, and have fair and robust examination procedures. We have now the opportunity to manage much more of this business ourselves, without so much oppressive intrusion from the QAA. If the result is mismanagement, we will probably end up with an even worse institution than the QAA.

The second danger is that we internalise the whole QAA system. We will be subject to institutional review every few years, and these reviews will include some inspection of individual subject provision. We could take a very risk-averse approach to that process, and insist that in every subject a vast quantity of bureaucratic paperwork is produced, relating to all the QAA codes of practice, programme specifications and subject benchmarks. That too would be a mistake. We should ensure that we are confident in our own systems for managing academic quality and standards, we should ensure that these systems are not unnecessarily bureaucratic, and we should then be prepared to defend them confidently.

The third risk is not under our control. The greatest enthusiasts for the QAA system are the journalists who work in the league-table industry. Lazy journalists like numbers that can produce easy headlines. The system will not be producing teaching-quality-assessment scores in the future, but the league-table industry will be searching for numbers and there is the danger that they will seize on statistics that are even less meaningful than subject-review scores. The new proposals require us to publish a range of performance indicators and we have to do our best to ensure that these indicators reflect our strengths and are interpreted sensibly.

There are risks, but the news is good. At Sussex, we also have the opportunity created by the restructuring of the Schools to shift responsibilities from Sussex House to the Schools. I believe that the combination of national change and local change can enable major improvements in how the University functions and in the student experience.

---

A walk on the wild side

David Harper and David Streeter BIOLS

As foretold last month, Blackberries are now providing a food bonanza for campus wildlife. By day the most obvious animals feasting on the fruit, which consists of clusters of 'druplets', are Robins and Blackbirds. In the scrubber areas these are joined by warblers such as Whitethroat and Garden Warbler as they move south through Britain at the start of their autumn migration.

All the birds mentioned so far are seed dispersers, benefiting themselves by feeding on the fruit pulp but aiding the plant by providing their seeds with wings. Some of the Blackberry seeds pass through the bird's gut and are then deposited in a moist package of fertiliser. The rest are ejected from the bird's mouth in much drier pellets.

Although many people associate these oral pellets with owls, such as the Tawny Owls now calling loudly around campus at night, they are produced by virtually all species of bird. Pellets tend to contain larger food items than do faeces, which means that dietary studies need to sample both sources of evidence. Robins feeding on Blackberries cough up pellets containing about 20 seeds in each.

Some of the animals feeding on Blackberries are not seed dispersers, but act as predators: many insects (e.g. some bush-cricket) feed on the pulp but do not transport the seeds, while some larger animals (such as Wood Mice and Blue Tits) feed directly upon the seeds, killing the Blackberry embryos inside.

Blackberries may be manna to wildlife but to botanists they are a nightmare. Their sex life is so arranged that although the flowers are pollinated by a whole range of insects, especially bees, the ovules are rarely fertilised. Blackberries thus share with dandelions and hawkweeds the unusual condition known as apomixis, where viable seed is set without fertilisation. This results in a huge number of 'micro-species' that are extraordinarily difficult to tell apart. The experts tell us that in Britain alone there are more than 300 different species!

They have also collected a plethora of local names as well as the traditional 'bramble', including its regional variants of 'brimnel', 'brummel' and 'bummel', and the 'brier' of northern England.

Although Brambles give the appearance of being abundant almost everywhere, they do become scarcer the further north that you go. At the same time Raspberries become commoner, until in Scandinavia the role change becomes complete.

Blackberrying and mushrooming are almost the only examples of traditional natural harvesting to have survived as regular seasonal activities. However, a word of warning! Tradition tells us that as Satan was cast out of Paradise he fell into a bramble bush and that on every anniversary of the Fall he returns to spit or urinate on the plant. Hence the superstition that it is unwise to eat blackberries after the old date of Michaelmas, 11 October, as they will be sour!

Below: In Britain alone there are more than 300 different species of Blackberry.
Unravelling the web

A new short course for industry, organised by the School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences (COGS), is proving to be a winner with web workers. The web usability course is aimed at people who are involved in the construction or management of interactive websites. "It is a very hands-on, practical one-day workshop, providing plenty of tips on how to involve users in the design process in order to save time and be cost-effective," says Dr Ian Wakeman (pictured centre), who set up the course with COGS colleagues Jon Rimmer (right) and Wendy Robins (left).

Ian is the academic director of the Centre for Advanced Software Applications (CASA), which acts as the industrial- liaison arm for COGS. Delegates on the new course gain a deeper understanding of why they should design web sites with the end user in mind and they leave equipped to perform simple user tests to enhance their designs.

The team have run the workshop both in-house and on campus, with delegates coming from local web-design companies, media companies based in London and further afield, as well as other universities and even the Computing Service at Sussex.

The feedback so far has been very positive, say the organisers. A senior project manager at Aktivtechnologie described the course as "dynamic, informative and highly enjoyable". "Thank you for the inspiring words and information," said Caroline Payne, a freelance designer. "I have just been checking out some related info, especially low-fi prototyping, which will make such a difference to my design approach in the future."

The web-usability workshop is linked with the University's 'Knowledge into business' strategy and is part of an ongoing effort at COGS to reach out and develop stronger ties with local companies and the new media sector in Brighton.

The course enables the research that is being carried out in COGS to become accessible and relevant to the business world and allows the research skills and knowledge in the School to be translated into directly applicable workplace skills in a more immediate manner than through traditional academic courses.

The aim over the coming years is to devise a portfolio of courses based on postgraduate modules, including e-commerce and interactive design. "This in turn will raise the profile of the School among local companies, enhancing both consultancy opportunities and graduate recruitment," says Ian.

Survey shows users are happy with Pevensey upgrade

Charles Goldie
Dean, School of Mathematical Sciences

In a first for the administration of General Teaching Space in the University, users of lecture theatres and rooms in the Pevensey building were asked their views on the physical facilities in the rooms before and after a major upgrade that took place over the Christmas and Easter vacations.

"Funds for the upgrade came as part of the Higher Education Funding Council's many-branched Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund and the University committed itself to before-and-after surveys in its bid. Faced, as Dean for General Teaching Space, with the task of organising these surveys I decided it would be mutually beneficial to commission them from the Graduate School in the Social Sciences. The Graduate School employed postgraduate student Emma Viney to do the work, under expert guidance."

Emma did a superb job. By meticulous preparation and by administering the questionnaires herself she achieved responses from all but four of the 328 users polled, a response rate of almost 99 per cent. Her report conclusively demonstrates a clear improvement in users' perceptions of the state of these teaching spaces, where the external funding enabled major upgrades to the blackboards and the projection arrangements, as well as renewal of furnishings.

Users, both teachers and students, did not just respond to what was formally asked on the questionnaires; they also volunteered their opinions and made suggestions. Taking these up will be a prime task for the members of the new body that is expected to plan General Teaching Space development from the autumn. As I sign off as the last Dean for General Teaching Space, it remains only for me to wish them luck.

Staff vacancies
Apply by 17 September
Clerical Assistant, CCE (pt, ref 179)
Lecturer in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence, COGS (ref 233)

Apply by 20 September
Assistant Registrar, Academic Office (ref 237)
Administrative Assistant, Academic Office (ref 238)

Apply by 30 September
Research Fellow, BIOLS (ref 034b)
Food & Bar Supervisor, Catering (ref 234)
Pensions Officer, Staffing Services (ref 242)

Apply by 24 September
Research Fellow, Genome Damage & Stability Centre (ref 036a)

Apply by 27 September
Research Fellow, BIOLS (ref 037a)

Apply by 29 September
Research Fellow, COGS (ref 036b)

Apply by 30 September
Research Fellow, CSU (ref 029a)
Research Fellow, BIOLS (ref 025a)

For further details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/units/staffing/personnel/evac or contact Staffing Services on ext. 8706, fax 877401, email recruitment@sussex.ac.uk.

Small ads
FOR SALE: Detached 4-bed family house in Kingston, nr Lewes. Offers over £300,000. Contact Carol on 07810 391820 or email cmander@btopenworld.com or ring Di on 472474.

ROOM TO LET: Single room, top floor of quiet period house in Kemp Town, sharing kitchen/bathroom with other tenants (married couple). PG, postdoc or staff only. Non-smoker. Available 16 Sep. £210 pcm + bills. Tel. 692969 jeremy.lane@ccwcom.net.

FOR SALE: Q-reg Ford Orion, MOT Tax 01 Jan., £650. Tel. 541420 or 07880 654432, email tapu9@sussex.ac.uk. FLAT SHARE: One person wanted for spacious double room in 2-bed Hove flat. Close to sea, station and shops. Suit professional non-smoker. Available now for min. 6 mths. £375pcm excl. bills. Ext. 8146 (day), tel. 727610 (eve), email l.murray@sussex.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: Palm-top computer with modem, speakers, MS Windows CE, internet ready. £80. Email kava43@centreal.sussex.ac.uk.

Bulletin
The fortnightly Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Peter Simmons, with regular contributions from Jacqui Bealing. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from staff and students of the University.

The next issue will be out on 28 September, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 21 September. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House on ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.

Bulletin