Clear advice about Clearing

It’s 9.00am on Thursday 15 August 2002. In a darkened room a student waits nervously by the phone. Soon it will spring into life revealing a clutch of A-Level results. Except, this student isn’t at home waiting for his own results. Instead, he is one of 14 students employed specially to staff the lines for clearing, here at the university.

The conference room in Sussex House has had its meeting table replaced by several rows of desks, computers, phones and prospectuses. At one end of the room a huge white board has the names of all the courses available and the marks required to get in. It’s just minutes since the phone lines opened and already English with Media Studies is full up, one of the first courses to close.

As calls come through the staff of this mini call centre enter nervous students’ UCAS numbers into a database. The computer program takes its time deciding to come to life, just, it seems, to keep the tension going on for a little bit longer; the database version of the golden envelope that’s tricky to open at the Oscars. Then a new page springs up, and amidst a confusing mess of figures, dates of birth and addresses is a single, unremarkable, line. If the students is lucky it says ‘Now Qualified’ and they are in and coming to Sussex.

For others the suspense continues. Notes on the computer tell the operator that Sussex is missing one vital piece of data and their entry cannot be confirmed. This student will have to fax the official marks over before they are guaranteed a place. And of course, for others, they simply haven’t made the grade. All the operator can do is say sorry and good luck.

For those who have achieved their aim of coming to Sussex, however, it can be an equally emotional experience. One girl breaks down in tears after hearing she has been accepted.

Soon the proper clearing calls also start filtering through. Students still looking for a place at university startring Sussex to get information about available courses and the grades required. Operators talk them through the process and put them through to tutors to discuss whether this would be the best option for them.

Clearing is a mammoth process.
“Togo give a scale of the operation there are 33 selectors, 12 admissions staff and 14 student helpers involved”, says Academic Registrar Owen Richards, “Planning began last autumn but the volume of work from mid August to mid September is still a real challenge.”

According to Senior Assistant Registrar & Admissions Officer Elizabeth Stewart the number of places up for clearing is only about 100, down from around 200 last year: “This is due mainly to good A-Level results” says Elizabeth, “Most of the students have met their predicted grades this year so only a few places are spare.”

By Tuesday lunchtime the previously frenetic call centre had died down to just a few students as almost every place at Sussex had gone.

Virtual campus tours go online

Students looking for a university place can now get a flavour of campus life thanks to a new virtual tour of the University of Sussex.

The virtual tour offers 360-degree panoramic views of over 20 locations including common rooms, lecture theatres, laboratories, student accommodation, and even Brighton beach. There are also photos, an interactive map of campus and information about academic services, transport links, and campus social life.

“We chose locations which we think work well, given our experience of showing visitors around campus,” says Laura Dewis, Schools Liaison Officer, who initiated and co-ordinated the project. “The tour gives a taster of what students can expect to find here, with a strong visual emphasis.”

Viewers can look in all directions including up and down and also zoom in and out of the panoramas. The overall effect is like standing on one spot and looking in all directions around you, giving a very realistic impression of the locations featured.

The panoramas were produced by StudentUK.com, a website offering information to potential students. Creating the panoramas takes only two shots per scene using a camera with a fisheye lens. The two images are then combined using iPix software, which corrects the distortion from the lens and creates a wrap-around 360-degree panoramic image.

The tours can be seen at www.sussex.ac.uk/USIS/campustour and also on the official UCAS website at www.ucas.com.
And the nominees are ...

Bill Cosby has more than 100, yet Ronald Reagan has only 20.
What are they? And what did Catherine Zeta Jones get in Swansea that Hollywood just couldn't deliver?

Well, every year universities all over the world bestow upon the great, the good, the noteworthy and noble the award of an honorary degree.

If you think you have a great suggestion as to who could receive an honorary degree from Sussex next year, now is the time to put pen to paper to nominate that person. Maybe you think one of Brighton's many celebrities is worthy of the ultimate academic honour, or maybe you know of a brilliant professor who deserves to be rewarded.

Honorary degrees cannot be bestowed on just anybody, though. There are a set of criteria to guide the nomination process.

Basically a nominee must fulfill in some way one of the following:

- They might have an academic connection to Sussex in terms of research or scholarship; they might be creative in the arts or distinguished in an area of business. The nominee may have played a prominent role in changing society as a whole or, on a more local level, have contributed to the life of the city or county. Those with an international slant are also encouraged.

Nominations can be famous but this is not essential at all. So long as they have excelled in their field and have had a distinguished career, they can be put forward.

To get the ideas flowing, here is a selection of noteworthy former Sussex honorary:

- Thabo Mbeki, president of South Africa; Jonathan Porritt, green activist; Professor Sir Harry Kroto, Nobel prize-winning father of the 'buckyball'; Harold Pinter, the playwright; and of course Sir Richard Attenborough and his brother David. Steven Spielberg almost got one in 1996, but he couldn't leave the set on Saving Private Ryan in Norfolk to reach the ceremony.

If you have any thoughts as to who you would like to see rewarded at the Dome in 2003, write a statement of no more than 200 words including biographical details of the nominee and send it to the Vice-Chancellor by 13 September. The nominee does not need to be informed.

For more information contact John Gaunt on ext. 8427 or email J.C.Gaunt@sussex.ac.uk.

Voluntary severance or early retirement scheme

The scheme for voluntary severance or early retirement which was original published on 21 June has been revised and has now been given final approval by the Finance and General Purpose Committee.

The scheme has been amended in light of consultation so that the benefits for lower paid staff and those with shorter service have been enhanced.

Where formal applications or informal enquiries have already been made, there is no need for these to be re-submitted. Without pre-empting consideration of any individual case, this process will not reduce any benefits, since the changes made are enhancements to the original draft scheme.

To ensure effective handling at a time of staff changes in the HR Division, all existing and new applications are being dealt with personally by Neil Gershon, Registrar & Secretary, as are informal written enquiries which are made to him in confidence. Applications will continue to be confidential to the Strategic Restructuring Group.

Full details of the scheme are available at www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/staffing/volsec.

Freeman Centre takes shape

The Freeman Centre, which will house SPRU (Science and Technology Policy Research) and the Centre for Research in Innovation Management (CENTRIM), is now taking shape. The 4,600 square metre building (pictured left) will accommodate 200 people and will be one of the first low-energy buildings on the Sussex campus, featuring low-energy ventilation and heating systems.

The building is named after SPRU's founder Professor Christopher Freeman and is funded with assistance from the Joint Infrastructure Fund.
Raising aspirations of London's youth

Staff in Schools & Colleges Liaison are looking for your help in raising the aspirations of young people in inner London. Planning is under way for the autumn programme of events bringing some of the capital's most able school pupils to campus and this is your chance to get involved.

Approximately 600 young people, aged from 13 to 18, have visited Sussex since March as part of the University's strategy to widen participation in higher education by under-represented social groups. A further 500 students at schools and colleges across 14 inner London boroughs have received visits from Sussex staff.

Under the Government's Excellence Challenge programme, national guidelines have been drawn up to help schools identify both their 'gifted and talented' and 'widening participation' cohorts. Selection is based on a range of social and educational criteria alongside a belief that these students have the ability and potential to go on to higher education.

As well as introductory workshops, activities included maths and physics master classes for 'gifted and talented' sixth formers; a spring school for sixth formers with focus on media and computing; subject tasters in linguistics, geography, physics, sociology, law, chemistry and media; and 'Hollywood Science' sessions with Dr Jonathan Hare.

For most of the teenagers, the visit to Sussex was their first experience of a university and many arrived with misconceptions and unfounded fears about what it would be like. Through fun activities and workshops their views and preconceptions were challenged. "As a result, many left with positive views on Sussex and higher education in general," says Jo Bishop, Widening Participation Officer.

To help with activities a group of student helpers were recruited, many of whom came from similar backgrounds in London. "The enthusiasm of these students made a particular impact and really helped to open up new ideas and thoughts about what university was all about," says Jo.

"I have learnt a lot of things, about some courses that I had never heard of and the provision made to support students financially," wrote one pupil on the evaluation form. "People any age over 18 can come, even old people," observed another. Other comments included, "Life at university is a balance of socialising and learning" and "University is just like normal life but you have to study at the same time".

Planning is now under way for the next academic year, with an economics/management taster day and a Year 8 science day early in the autumn term.

For further information or to get involved in future events, contact Jo on ext. 3580 or email j.m.bishop@sussex.ac.uk.

A walk on the wild side

David Harper and David Streeter BIOLS

Some of the most attractive features of campus, particularly at this time of year, are the pools that Sir Basil Spence designed to complement several of the major buildings.

Their character varies from the uncompromisingly abiotic landscape features of the Falmer House and Meeting House moats to the lush tropical pool outside the Gardner Arts Centre. For many, the most successful from the aesthetic point of view is the rectangular pond between Arts A and Arts B, planted up with a variety of different-coloured water-lilies. While not as spectacular as his water gardens at Giverny, we feel sure that even Claude Monet would have found inspiration for paintings here.

Water-lilies hold the record for our largest wild flowers. The larger the flower, the more successful it will be at attracting pollinators but for most plants there is a limit set by its architecture – the flower can’t be so big that the plant falls over. Water-lilies, on the other hand, suffer no such constraint as they are essentially floating bowls.

Less welcome is the rather undistinguished looking water weed that is rapidly spreading all over the pond. This has been christened New Zealand Pigmyweed or Australian Swamp Stonecrop. As its names suggests, it is a succulent plant hailing from Australia and the South Island of New Zealand. It was first detected growing wild in Essex in 1956. Unhappily it is commonly sold in garden centres and gets thrown out into the countryside when it becomes a problem. Just 5 mm of stem is capable of regenerating a whole plant and so it is easily transferred between water-bodies by accident. It spreads rapidly along the borders of ponds and reservoirs, completed obliterating the native plants, and it is notoriously difficult to control.

The luxuriant planting of the Gardner Arts Centre moat is mostly effected by the exuberant clumps of Galgalie, a sedge closely related to the Egyptian Papyrus. Mixed in with this is the occasional statuesque plant of Reedmace or Bulrush, much favoured by flower arrangers.

We also spotted the mauve dome-shaped inflorescence of Water Mint, a common wild flower of ponds and marshes and, with the familiar culinary Spear (Garden) Mint, one of the parents of Peppermint (a hybrid first grown in 1750).

A peculiar feature of both ponds is that, apart from the fish, there appears to be a total lack of aquatic animal life! We spent a hot and fruitless afternoon at the traditional past-time of pond dipping in order to bring you some news of campus aquatic biodiversity. We completely failed, even though the Blue-tailed Damsellflies we described in June have laid many eggs in both ponds.

We are looking into possible reasons for this unexpected state of affairs. Our leading suspects are the large shoals of fish that the younger visitors to campus are currently finding so intriguing.
Sporting Disabled 2002

A participant at Sporting Disabled 2002 is pictured right benefitting from professional tennis coaching. The whole week event offered opportunities for disabled people to try sports they may not otherwise be able to experience.

Meridian TV News visited campus to film the event, and organiser Aruna Sharma from COGS was also interviewed on Southern Counties Radio.

Small ads

TO LET: Room in furnished 2-bed flat in Roedean Road, B’ton. £80pcw inc. Contact Stephen or Dina on 07789 53216.

TO LET: Single study-bedroom in non-smoking house in Hanover. Share kitchen and bathroom with owner. Own phone line, weekly cleaner. Suit PG or mature student. £250 pcm inc. except phone. Email A.M.Chisholm@sussex.ac.uk or tel. 670509.

FOR SALE: Breakthrough Greek, beginner's self-study course, inc.

3 audio cassettes and book, £10, buyer collects. Tel. 678013 or email s.turnbull@sussex.ac.uk

FOR SALE: Specialised Hard Rock mountain bike. Shimano gears. About 5 yrs old. £55 ono. Ext. 8397 or email r.cox@sussex.ac.uk.

WANTED: Long-term house sitting or cheap own accommodation for mature finalist. Refs available. Email lcv5@sussex.ac.uk.

TO LET: Room in friendly family house. £65 p/w inc. Hanover area. Tel. Janee on 671017 or 07808 174421 or email janeze2sa@ntworld.com.


TO LET: Room in two person house share. Female, 25+ sought to share a lovely, well-kept house in Brighton with professional female and cat. Large kitchen and bathroom, lounge/dining room, small garden. 10 mins walk from station and seafront. £425 pcm + bills. Contact: Mary-Louise on 07713 631732.

Help for The Gambia

Shell Morgan
Assistant Planning Officer

I have been fortunate to have been involved in some form of education for 25 out of my 34 years. It is not until you visit a country where education is neither free nor a right that you realise just how privileged you are living in a country where this is the case.

In January, I went to The Gambia with a friend for a holiday on a last-minute deal. I had never considered Africa for a holiday so I knew nothing about the country, nor did I have any preconceptions. The only thing I was told was to take pencils out for the children, which I did.

The Gambia is a poverty-stricken country whose economy relies on farming and tourism. Its affluence is determined by the timing of the rainy season. In The Gambia, education starts at age 7 and finishes at 16 but parents have to pay for it, leaving a high percentage of the population uneducated. Women often form unions or collectives and produce food to help fund their children's schooling. Some unions or collectives pay for their children to attend pre-school classes.

After getting to know a Gambian tourist guide, we asked him if he could take us to a school off the tourist trail so we could deliver the package of pencils we had brought with us. He took us to a pre-school in the provinces called the Brikama Mothers Union School.

The school was a shack that looked as if it was about to fall down or blow away in the wind. There were two rooms and inside each were approximately 15 children, sitting either on the mud floor or on wooden benches. The children live in abject poverty and although threadbare, all were dressed in clean school uniforms. Alongside the shack was the shell of a new building. Parents raised enough money to start building two years ago but it has remained unfinished due to lack of funds. They undertake all the building work. Due to the state of the existing building, the pupils' schooling is affected by the bad weather.

The Headmistress is totally dedicated to her job. The average wage in The Gambia is approximately £30 a month but she is paid only £4 a month by the parents. She believes that education is the route to help improve people's lives.

My hope is to raise £3,500, which will not only complete the school but also supply the necessary equipment for it to function. The aim of this project is not one of patronage, but rather to assist the school in getting itself into a position where it can pursue funding from other sources. Loch Brown, who is a DPhil student based in AFRAS, is currently undertaking research in The Gambia. He will co-ordinate the project.

If you would like to make a donation, please send a cheque made payable to the Brikama Mothers Union Pre-School Fund to Shell Morgan. I live in the Internal Audit Office in Sussex House.

Please help - you could really make a difference. Thank you.

Bulletin

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

The next issue will be out on 6 September, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 30 August. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House on ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.