Study aims to help children develop better social skills

A major research project by University of Sussex psychologists is being used in seven Brighton primary schools to identify and help children who are rejected by their peers.

More than 330 children are involved in the three-year CSB project, which is being funded by Brighton and Hove City Council and will be used to create classroom activities to develop better social skills.

Dr Robin Banerjee (pictured), a developmental psychologist leading the research, says the point of the study is to spot the children who are having difficulties before their problems become major. He says the first year’s findings give an important indication of how these problems persist.

"The children who were rejected by their peers at the beginning of the year were still rejected at the end of the year," he says. "Yet when we looked at how they felt about themselves, we found they were often the most socially anxious. Others found them aggressive and their behaviour unacceptable, but they had little idea how to improve their peer status."

The response so far from teachers and educators has been highly positive, according to Robin. "The demands of the academic curriculum mean that schools and teachers are often not able to focus so much on the social context of schools. But children's peer interactions do have an effect on their academic performance."

Robin, together with research fellow Dawn Watling and eight researchers, is working with local school children aged from five to ten.

The children, who work with a computer interface, are seen three times during the course of each year. They are asked to identify their classroom friends, and are then given various story scenarios with a set of questions. Their responses give the researchers data not just about the child’s behaviour, but also how they think and feel about their world.

During the first year the researchers found that, across the entire group of children, 14% were rated as popular by their classmates; 14% were neglected (neither liked, nor disliked), 12% were rejected (given negative responses), 6.8% fell into a ‘controversial’ category (whereby they received many positive and negative responses), and the rest (53%) were classified as average.

The results are being fed back to Brighton and Hove City Council educational psychologists, who are devising activities that teachers can introduce in class to help children discover more appropriate modes of behaviour.

They have already developed a preliminary ‘Emotional Literacy Curriculum’, which involves small-group and whole-class activities that allow children to explore their thoughts and feelings about peer inter-actions through drama, writing, art and discussion.

Robin and his colleagues are due to hold a conference about the research project during spring 2004.

Pulse nominated for two national awards

Budding journalists at Sussex have had their hard work rewarded by being nominated for two prestigious national awards.

Pulse, the University’s student magazine, will go up against fellow south-coast universities Portsmouth and Bournemouth in the Guardian Student Media Awards 2003. The team magazine has been nominated in the categories of Student Magazine of the Year and Small Budget Publication of the Year.

Katy Fuke, editor of Pulse, said: "It's absolutely brilliant that all the work the Pulse team put in over the year has paid off. We can't wait until the ceremony to hear if we've won!"

The Guardian picked the shortlisted few according to the publications’ "intelligent mix; accurate targeting of the student and local readership; strong ideas; high-quality writing; thoughtful packaging of articles; clear and confident presentation; design, and 'selling' of contents".

The winning editor will get the chance to work on the Guardian, while the team will receive easyJet flights and £500. Pulse not only gives students the chance to try their hand at journalism, but also provides opportunities for photographers, graphic and fashion designers. Past members of the Pulse team have gone on to work for national publications, including The New Statesman and the Independent.

Produced completely by students in their spare time, it has been awarded the Guardian gong for Student Magazine of the Year several times already.
In brief

New room bookings procedures
A new online room booking request form will be available at www.sussex.ac.uk/USIS/roomquest/ from Monday (22 September) for bookings of general teaching space (GTS) rooms, both in term-time and vacations. The form has been developed by the Web Team in conjunction with the central Room Bookings Office and the Conference Office, to enable them to provide a more speedy and efficient service to those wishing to book rooms at any time of the year. Feedback on the form would be most welcome: email roombookings@sussex.ac.uk.

Early music fest
Two members of Sussex faculty, Dr Roger Fenn from SciTech and Professor Jenny Pain from Life Sciences, are members of the organising committee for a new arts venture, the Brighton Early Music Festival. This will take place between 26 September and 5 October, with more than 20 events over two weekends, plus a mid-week concert. Roger and Jenny are both members of the local choir Brighton Consort, which will perform in Thomas Tallis’ 40 part motet Spem in Allum and Monteverdi’s 1610 Vespers. See bremf.org.uk.

Physics triumph
The Institute of Physics is to award Professor David Wark its £1,000 Rutherford Medal and Prize “for his personal contributions to particle astrophysics, in particular to the field of solar neutrinos”. The award commemorates Lord Rutherford of Nelson and is given for contributions to nuclear physics, elementary particle physics or nuclear technology.

Carbon cut symposium
SPRU is hosting a symposium on Monday 6 October to address the UK’s ability to achieve a 60% carbon cut by 2050. To register your interest in attending the symposium – which takes place at the Freeman Centre from 11am-4pm – send your name and contact details to Andy Wilson, email a.r.wilson@sussex.ac.uk.

Oh! What a lovely party
Stars of stage and screen gathered in the Downs Restaurant earlier this month to celebrate the 80th birthday of the University Chancellor, Lord Attenborough.

The 180 guests included Edward Fox, Angela Thorne and other members of the cast and crew of Oh! What A Lovely War, Lord Attenborough’s directorial debut. He shot the film in Brighton and ‘borrowed’ Sussex students as extras, playing the cannon-fodder sent to almost certain death in the trenches.

The Downs Restaurant had been transformed into the theatre on the end of the West Pier (as it used to be!), complete with a bandstand for the wind quintet from the Band of the Coldstream Guards, who played music from the film.

The birthday cake was a magnificent representation of the West Pier, created by University pastry chef, Gemma Tipplady (pictured left). Lord Attenborough cut the cake with a sword borrowed from a guest in the uniform of a 1914 major-general.

Michael O’Sullivan, Senior Vice-President of Paramount Pictures, disclosed at the event that Oh! What A Lovely War is about to be released for the first time in video and DVD formats, in celebration of its director’s 80th birthday. Look out for the DVD especially; a Paramount crew were filming the birthday party for inclusion as an extra feature.

The money raised from the event – already over £15,000 – will be used to help students from low-income and ethnic-minority families go to university.

Hope, hype and hysteria grip the Freeman Centre
The new Freeman Centre played host to its first international conference last month, ‘Hope, Hype and Hystria: Living with Genetic Uncertainty’.

The title of the conference reflected the research interests of the group of doctoral students who organised the meeting. The group, the Postgraduate Forum on Genetics in Society (PFGS), have run seven annual meetings to date, at a different university each year – proving that it is possible for students to run a sustainable series of meetings in the UK funding environment.

The meeting had the aim of promoting debate among research students from a range of social science disciplines, while at the same time allowing them to gain experience and strengthen their research by presenting their work in a friendly and informal atmosphere.

Delegates came from as far afield as Canada, Estonia, Ghana and Scandinavia, as well as from all corners of the UK.

Invited speakers included Professor Ian Diamond, chief executive of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which supported the event. They also included representatives from three ESRC research centres at Edinburgh, Exeter and Lancaster dedicated to researching the social and ethical impact of genetics on society.

The high quality of the presentations led to some very positive feedback. It seems delegates were also very impressed with the new Freeman Centre, as well as Brighton’s fish and chips – a real novelty for overseas visitors.

Find out more about the PFGS at www.pfgs.org or by contacting the conference organiser, m.m.hopkins@sussex.ac.uk.

Sussex resurgent
The University has risen six places in the Sunday Times league table, published last week (14 September).

The newspaper ranks Sussex =25th in its University Guide, up from 31st last year. On its measure of research quality, Sussex comes in just outside the top ten. The profile highlights the new arts curriculum and this year’s 16% rise in applications, which, it comments, “endorses the university’s attempts to recreate its former sustainability”. “The academic reorganisation has not dished Sussex’s famous interdisciplinary approach,” the profile goes on to say. “Rather it has made it more explicit and extensive.” Other new developments also come in for a mention, including the Freeman Centre and the Medical School (to be launched in conjunction with the University of Brighton), which the paper describes as “the mark of a serious academic player”.

“Brighton’s renaissance and its new city status can only encourage the university’s resurgence,” concludes the Sunday Times.
VC's voice

I know that this summer has been disrupted for many staff by the huge number of office changes that have taken place as a result of the re-organisation of schools coupled with some urgently needed re-wiring and re-cabling work. It is impossible to manage such a far-reaching programme of work without substantial disruption, there are almost always unexpected difficulties and delays, and it is difficult to keep everyone properly informed. I am grateful to everyone for coping with the disruption.

The start of term will be a challenge for all of us, as we bring new students into an institution implementing three different structural changes: a new administrative structure, a new syllabus structure for many students, and on-going changes to building structures in many parts of the campus. It is essential that for our new students these new systems work as well as they possibly can.

Inevitably, some aspects of the new systems will turn out to be imperfect. I know, in particular, that there are anxieties about whether we have the right balance of support provision between schools and departments. Where things have not been got quite right, they can be changed.

Most programmes of institutional change face the problem that much of the pain comes before the reward, but in our case we are now beginning to see the rewards of change. The increase in undergraduate applications has translated into a much stronger undergraduate intake this year.

Except for some foundation year programmes, the University did not go into Clearing, for the first time for many years. The average A-level score of the first-year intake rose from 22.9 in 2002 to 25.5 in 2003 (25.7 would have got us into the top ten universities in 2003). All the signs are that we will have a substantial increase in international student numbers and in graduate student numbers also.

The strengthening of our admissions position is not uniform across the University (and a key task for the next two years will be to improve the position in those areas that are less strong), but overall this is truly excellent news for the University.

Another round of major institutional change is not on the agenda for the foreseeable future. We have to concentrate on making our new structures work and ensuring that they deliver the improvements in teaching and research for which they have been designed. But a significant off-campus development is in the very earliest stages of planning.

We have been in discussions with the local authorities in Crawley and Horsham about the possibility of a significant expansion of higher education in mid-Sussex. This is an area with much demographic potential for such a development, though what can be done will depend on the extent to which governments are willing over the next 10 years to provide adequate resources for a national expansion of higher education. Ideas for a development in Horsham were presented to Council in July and it was agreed that they were extremely exciting. Watch this space!

American Express and University of Sussex open new IT development centre

Glen Salow, Executive Vice President and Chief Information Officer of American Express, flew in from New York this week to open the multinational's new technologies centre at the Sussex Innovation Centre.

American Express has joined forces with the University of Sussex to launch an innovative information technology programme, which combines experience in the workplace with academic study. Students will be based at the new centre on campus.

The new scheme means that 30 graduates will have the chance to develop their career potential by working part-time for American Express, while also studying for an IT Masters degree at the University. American Express plans to offer a number of permanent positions to students once they have graduated from the two-year programme.

"It is an honour to open the new technologies centre and to mark the official launch of the new course," said Mr Salow (pictured below right). "The new MSc offers an unrivalled package of part-time postgraduate study combined with hands-on IT experience in the financial services sector. We hope that working for American Express will help these students immensely in their future careers."

Vision becomes clearer

The University came one step closer to a new identity last week, as possible designs were shown to a range of staff across the University.

Blaze!, the company designing the new logo 'marque', displayed three potential new looks to around 30 academic, administrative and Students' Union colleagues on 11 September. After the reactions of these staff have been gauged, the decision on a final design will go to the Senior Management Group on 29 September. Following this, further work will be done to refine the design ready for a launch in the new year.

Rob Read, Director of Communications and part of the group working on the project, said: "Letting a cross-section of staff see the possible designs will allow us properly to assess their effectiveness and any implementation issues before we launch."

The new logo is one result of the major 'Sussex Vision' research project, which assessed how the University is seen by staff, students and those outside campus and explored how it should be positioned in the future.
Small ads


WANTED: Self-contained accommodation in Lewes for female PG. Up to £950pcm. Email klasky@lineone.net.

WANTED: Organiser/chairperson for church in Offham, nr Lewes. Vintage Hall II manual organ. RSCM rates and fees. Contact Jenny Money on ext. 7778, email jenm@sussex.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: VW Polo CL 5-dr saloon. R reg (Aug 97), 62k miles. MoT Aug 04. £3,500. Contact Billy on bk.leung@sussex.ac.uk.

FOR SALE: Sony 21" TV, £150 ono, Toshiba 14" TV, £300 ono; full tower computer case, £30; Tefal cordless kettle, £10; HP Scanjet 6200C Pro USB flatbed scanner, £50. Contact Billy on bk.leung@sussex.ac.uk.

WANTED: For Sale: 1.4 Astra. For Sale: 1.4. Tax Apr 04, MoT June 04, £300 ono. Contact Alan on 07766 135306 or email A.R.Lindridge@ sussex.ac.uk

WANTED: For Sale: USB 4-port hub with transformer. Suits PC and Mac. £10. Call 01903 767661.

WANTED: People to participate in food and drink research. Earn up to £80 per study. Email martin@central.sussex.ac.uk

TO LET: Student house in the city, all bills included, £450 pcm. Tel. 874264.

New buildings are coming up and old ones are being renovated. As you may already know, BIOLS building has been renamed after the eminent biologist, Professor John Maynard Smith. Over in Arts, the temporary teaching block (pictured below), which is almost complete, has been christened the Russell building, after nearby Russell's Cuff.

By the start of term the aim is to have old external signs updated and new signs produced to aid navigation. The Arts blocks and Mantell building will also be completely renovated. Bright new banners will complement the new signs by pointing out the five school offices. The science blocks cannot be completed at the moment, but schools will be producing temporary signage.

New maps have been produced for leaflets and to be displayed around campus. Colourful floor

Lectures, seminars, colloquia

Mon 22 Sep
9.30am-5.30pm
Graduate Research Centre for the Humanities and Department of English: Encounters with Derrida. See www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/HUMCENTR/derrida2003/programme.php.

Tue 23 Sep
9.30am-6.00pm
Graduate Research Centre for the Humanities and Department of English: Encounters with Derrida. See www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/HUMCENTR/derrida2003/programme.php.

Thu 25 Sep
1.00-2.30 pm
John Williamson (Inst. for International Economics, Washington DC), After the Washington Consensus. IDS Rm 120

Staff vacancies

Apply by 24 Sep
Departmental Co-ordinator, Hums (ref 317)

Apply by 26 Sep
Co-ordinator, Regional Development Office (ref 524)
SME Link Co-ordinator, Regional Development Office (ref 325)
Secretary, Regional Development Office (ref 326)

Apply by 30 Sep
Lecturer in Astrophysics, (ref 284)
Lecturer in Continuing Education (Archaeology), CCE (ref 305)
Senior Lecturer/Lecturer in Law, Sussex Law School (ref 321)
Research Psychologist, Cancer Research UK Psychosocial Oncology Group (ref 054b)
Lecturer(s) in International Relations, SocSci (ref 322/323)
Apply by 8 October
Senior Library/Archivist, Special Collections (ref 053b)

Apply by 10 October
Research Fellow, Biochemistry (ref 056b)

Apply by 13 Oct
Research Fellow, Genome Damage and Stability Centre (ref 056b)

For further details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/staffing/personnel/vacancies or contact Human Resources on ext. 8706, fax 877401, email recruitment@sussex.ac.uk.

Bulletin

The Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Benedict Brook, with 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 3 October, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 26 September. Please contact the Press and Communications Office in Sussex House or ext. 8888 or email Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.