The pamper effect:

Beauty salons as the new women’s refuge

Women burdened by the competing demands of job, home, family and fashion are seeking therapy in greater numbers than ever before. But it’s beauty salons, not the services of analysts and counsellors, that are profiting from the stressed-out casualties of modern life.

Once the preserve of ‘ladies who lunch’, beauty salons are becoming the refuge of harassed working mothers and time-poor, cash-rich female professionals, by offering escape from responsibility and a bit of TLC with the facials and manicures. A typical client is a 30-something career woman who may be juggling family responsibilities and who also feels the need to look youthful and well groomed.

The insights come from a new book by Sussex sociologist Dr Paula Black – The Beauty Industry: Gender, culture, pleasure – published later this month by Routledge.

Paula based her research on interviews carried out with beauty-salon owners, beauticians and their clients in the north of England and the Midlands, and her findings highlight the social forces that shape our lives today.

“If you look at the stats, the beauty business is a real growth industry. I began my research five years ago, and Botox wasn’t even heard of then,” says Paula. “All of the beauticians compared themselves to nurses, even though they can’t actually do invasive treatments such as injections.

“The clients themselves also believe they are deriving real benefit from these services, not just in how they look, but how they feel. They have busy lives and want to claim back some time for themselves in the salon.”

Paula adds: “Women also have treatments such as eye brow shaping, manicures and fake tans, because they have to project a professional, well-groomed image, particularly if they work in the service industries, where they are in contact with the public. Some even use salon therapies such as reflexology and massage to ease the symptoms of conditions such as multiple sclerosis and RSI.”

Men are also buying into the beauty culture in increasing numbers; particularly high-flying businessmen who want to endorse their professional status. “Men are having treatments such as waxing and manicures,” says Paula.

But there is another side to the booming beauty industry, says Paula. “Shame is also driving women to beauty salons. People’s natural bodies are seen to be ‘wrong’ and need disciplining into an ideal – having hair removed by electrolysis, for example, or thread vein removal. The beauty industry profits from this. Often women feel too ashamed to admit they’ve had such treatments, or can ill-afford them.”

The beauticians themselves are not always keen, either, to advertise what they do for a living. “Most beauty therapists will say they work in the health industry,” says Paula, “because they fear being labelled a bimbo or sex worker.”

Inside

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4 One isn’t fun Informatics help make computer gaming more sociable.

5 4:59:59 Students cheer on latecomers at the annual 5 o’clock run.

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7 Nice ‘n’ sexy Why sex makes us, actually, terribly nice people.

Lynne Truss gives writing tips to Sussex students

International best-selling author Lynne Truss gave trade tips to Sussex creative writing students last week as part of a new lecture series set up in association with the prestigious Asham Literary Endowment Trust.

For the inaugural Asham Sussex Lecture on Saturday (15 May), Brighton-based Truss told personal anecdotes and gave advice about the process and discipline of being a writer.

The lecture was followed by the launch of Elephant Heights, an anthology of work by students who have taken the Certificate in Creative Writing at the University’s Centre for Continuing Education (CCE). Also on sale were books by tutors and former creative writing students.

Course convenor Richard Crane said: “Lynne is a good example of a writer working in different forums across the media – from journalism to radio to fiction and non-fiction.” She is the author of the best-seller Eats, Shoots and Leaves, a passionate defence of proper punctuation inspired by a joke about a panda and the misuse of a comma.

The Asham Literary Endowment Trust was established by Lewes District Council eight years ago to support and encourage new writers. It was named after Asham House in Sussex where Virginia and Leonard Woolf lived.

The Trust, which runs a biennial national short-story competition for women, has recently received a grant from Arts Council England to fund educational development and outreach work. A figure of £30,000 has been allocated for the first year’s activities, which include the Sussex Asham Lecture. Asham Endowment Trust administrator Carole Buchan said: “The lecture is just the start of our collaboration with the CCE course and it will be an annual event. We will also be working with them on a number of projects to encourage new writers.”
BOOKMARK

Jonathan Buckley (Visiting Fellow, TLDU) Invisible Fourth Estate, £16.99 (hardback)

Amazon.co.uk says: "A lyrical and beautifully realised novel about a blind man’s experiences of the world around him... Invisible interweaves multiple voices—voices in conversation, voices in writing, on tape, in memory. It’s an investigation of our perception of the world and our place in it."

Denise de Caires Narain (Senior Lecturer in English) Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry: Making style Routledge, £19.99 (paper)

The publisher says: "Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry provides detailed readings of individual poems by women poets whose work has not yet received the sustained critical attention it deserves. These readings are contextualized both within Caribbean cultural debates and postcolonial and feminist critical discourses in a lively and engaging way, revisiting nationalist debates as well as topical issues about the performance of gendered and raced identities within poetic discourse."

Jeremy Page (Deputy Director, Sussex Language Institute) (ed.) Three Voices Flogmore, £3.95 (paper)

Featuring work by three poets including Rachel Playforth, Resources Assistant in the Language Learning Centre.

Paul Webb (Professor of Politics) and Thomas Poguntke (eds) The Presidentialization of Politics: A comparative study of modern democracies Oxford, £45.00 (hardback)

The publishers say: "In this major new work, leading experts come together to examine the changing role of political parties and political leadership in fourteen modern democracies. As well as examining cross-national differences, The Presidentialization of Politics analyses how modern democracies are increasingly following a presidential logic of governance, through which leadership is becoming more central and more powerful, but also increasingly dependent on successful appeal to the mass public."

Doorstep-selling laws inadequate

Doorstep-selling legislation needs to be updated to combat the psychological tactics employed by many salespeople, say two Sussex psychologists in a report for the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), published this month.

The study into the practice of selling goods and services on the doorstep and in the home, worth at least £2.4 billion a year, found that a range of sales tactics and influencing techniques can lead consumers to make inappropriate purchases that they later regret.

This highlights a gap in consumer protection. The current legislation gives consumers who are cold-called a seven-day period in which to cancel a contract. This protection does not apply to consumers who asked for the visit, even though research by Dr Helga Dittmar and Emma Halliwell indicates that these consumers are no better prepared to resist these sales tactics.

At least 15,000 complaints a year are made to trading standards departments regarding doorstep sales. Most respondents to the survey said they felt buying in the home was more pressurised than other settings.

Helga and Emma identified six psychological influencing principles:

1. Reciprocity — creating in the consumer a feeling of indebtedness to the salesperson. Free samples, services and discounts can transform a business transaction into a social visit, imitating that of a friend.
2. Consistency and commitment — building up the consumer’s commitment to the product so that a decision not to purchase looks inconsistent. Using personal information gleaned from the consumer’s home to gain agreement that they are interested in a product ‘if the price is right’ means that the seller can remind the consumer of this commitment when offering a discount.
3. Scarcity and anticipated regret — generating a sense of urgency and of loss if a purchase is not made. People dislike feeling regret and are motivated to avoid it.
4. Social proof — making the consumer feel they are like everyone else who bought the product. People have a tendency to use the behaviour of others as a guideline for their own.
5. Liking and similarity — gaining information about a consumer’s likes and dislikes in order to identify with them, build a rapport and gain their trust. People prefer to say yes to someone they like and liking is increased by perceived similarity.
6. Authority and expert endorsement — working on the principle that people will defer to expert opinion.

As a result of the study, the OFT is recommending that government should extend legislation to give cancellation rights to solicited visits as well as unsolicited. The OFT will also run a consumer education campaign to raise awareness of consumers’ rights and alert them to the psychological techniques used and how to combat them.

Research funding opportunities →

More details of these and other funding opportunities are available from your Research Support Officer in the Research & Regional Development Division. For an extensive listing of funding opportunities, search the Community of Science (COS) database at www.cos.com

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<tr>
<th>EPSRC SUPERGEN Call 5</th>
<th>EPSRC Industrial Programme support scheme (PPS5)</th>
<th>NERC Standard Research Grants and Consortium Grants</th>
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<td>EP expression of interest are invited from those wishing to participate in research consortia to undertake studies in sustainable power generation and supply. This call will incorporate research under three themes: 1. wind energy; 2. UK energy infrastructure; 3. biofuel crops.</td>
<td>The scheme is a collaborative grant scheme designed to encourage collaboration between industry and researchers. It provides funding for the purchase of equipment, consumables, and salary costs of research staff, up to a maximum of £75,000 p.a. for up to three years.</td>
<td>Standard research grants are available to support projects costing more than £30,000 for a period of up to 3 years. Consortium grants are intended to support focused, co-ordinated, collaborative research involving a minimum of three institutions.</td>
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<td>Deadline: 7 June</td>
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<th>ESRC New Security Challenges programme</th>
<th>BBSRC Responsive Mode Grants &amp; New Investigators Scheme</th>
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<td>This call is for small (under £45k) and larger proposals (over £45k). The intention is to support co-ordinated networks of research projects at geographically distributed sites. Projects are expected to be multidisciplinary.</td>
<td>Standard research grants fund projects that address the scientific issues relevant to BBSRC's mission. Most awards are for three years. The New Investigator's Scheme is open to new researchers within 3 years of their first appointment, providing funds of up to £180k.</td>
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<td>Deadline 2 July</td>
<td>Administrative cut-off: 19 July</td>
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VC's VOICE

On Friday last week (14 May), a group of graduate students organised a conference at the University in memory of the great Palestinian academic Edward Said. A stimulating conference programme attracted a large audience, from Sussex and elsewhere, and there were lively and informative exchanges. The University is proud to have students who can create such a wonderful occasion.

One of the topics of discussion was the disturbing photographs of prisoner abuse that have emerged from Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad. On the one hand, these pictures illustrate a central theme in Said's writings about the relationship between the 'western' world and the Arab world. And they pose to us in the 'western' world troubling questions about our world and the way we chose to govern it. But, on the other hand, the view was expressed that the widespread circulation of the photographs on the front pages of the world press was a further violation of the rights of the prisoners. The debate reminds us that issues of freedom of speech and of information can become quite complex in the context of the contested politics of the Middle East.

Closer to home, we have our own issues about freedom of speech. There has been a sharp controversy in the columns of the student newspaper, the Badger. Zaki El-Salahi, Education Officer of the Students' Union, described a pro-Israeli campaign as "racist propaganda" and suggested that Zionist views should be "targeted" by a "no platform for racists" policy. In turn, an officer of the national Union of Jewish Students has complained that views expressed in the Badger amount to incitement to racial hatred and suggested that the University take action to prevent a repetition.

I do not accept that Zaki's writing in the Badger is an incitement to racial hatred and the University therefore defends his freedom of expression. Equally, the University upholds the right of freedom of expression of students who are as proud to be Zionist as Zaki is. (And quite apart from the moral principle, the University and the officers of the Students' Union are bound by the requirements of the Education Act 1986 to ensure freedom of speech.)

Freedom-of-speech issues have also arisen in relation to recruitment to the World Bank. A meeting this week that many students wished to attend to learn about career prospects in the World Bank has had to be postponed, but it will take place at a later date. Those who wish to criticise the World Bank may do so, but students who take a different view are entitled to make their own career choices.

It is exactly two years since I last wrote a column in the Bulletin on freedom of speech, and I am happy to repeat the same message now: Diversity of opinion is a defining characteristic of a university. Freedom to express popular views is easy to concede — it is freedom to express unpopular views that needs thoughtful defence. The slogan "no platform for racists" is superficially attractive, but a university must provide a platform for all sorts of ideas.

While safeguarding freedom of speech, we must also be robust in our promotion of race equality, and we must ensure that we provide a safe environment for study and research. The crucial line is that between unwelcome ideas and unwelcome actions. The freedom to express unpopular views must be defended with vigour, for bad manners or practices that discriminate, threaten, abuse or intimidate must be attacked with equal vigour.

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University plays host to Commonwealth visitors

Ministers and MPs from Commonwealth countries were guests of the University last week (12 May) as part of a visit arranged by the UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Every year, the CPA's UK branch, based in Westminster, invites fellow branches to visit the UK as part of the Association's mission to promote parliamentary democracy. The two-week May visit is one of the highlights of a calendar of seminars and other events.

This year, Brighton played host to a delegation of MPs, ministers and speakers from countries including Australia, Canada, Kenya, Malaysia, New Zealand, Nigeria, St Lucia, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

The day-long campus visit to Sussex formed part of the two-week tour and included presentations by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith, on funding in higher education, and Regional Development Manager, Sharon Phillips, on the University's business links and initiatives.

During the day delegates also toured the campus and met students, particularly those from the visiting countries represented.

Postgraduate recruitment figures up again

For the third successive year, postgraduate recruitment figures are up.

There has been a modest improvement compared to May last year. Applications have increased by 7%, offers by 4% and acceptances by 9%.

This compares with the dramatic overall increases in 2003: 22% in applications, 22% in offers and 27% in acceptances; and 2002: 23% in applications, 20% in offers and 6% in acceptances.

The modest increase this year is primarily due to the continued growth in overseas recruitment. By contrast, home and EU numbers have fallen in almost all categories.

"We are approximately two-thirds of the way through the admissions cycle so there is still room for improvement," says Terry O'Donnell from the Postgraduate Office, "although clearly we are not going to experience the dramatic increases we enjoyed in 2002 and 2003."

"Nonetheless, with an overall increase of 9% in acceptances the picture remains bright, especially if we are able to convert that number into registered students."
Violence in God’s name?

From left to right: Sheikh Musa Admami, Oliver McTernan, Chana Moshenska.

A seminar that addressed the topical issues of religious conflict and terrorism filled the Meeting House to capacity this month. More than 30 people had to be turned away from the third Religion and Extremism seminar, organised by Father Rob Esdaile of the Catholic chaplaincy, Chana Mosheńska of the Centre for German-Jewish Studies and Dr Stella Rock, research fellow in history.

The keynote speaker was Oliver McTernan, a well-known writer and broadcaster, and director of Forward Thinking, an organisation that aims to develop stronger contacts with the UK Muslim community and to engage globally in an inclusive approach to conflict resolution.

McTernan, who has worked in trouble spots as varied as Northern Ireland, Russia, the Horn of Africa and the Balkans, wrote Violence in God’s Name: Religion in an age of conflict as a Fellow of the Harvard Center for International Affairs. His book challenges the orthodoxy that religion is marginal in world affairs, and argues that religions must take responsibility for the traditions and texts used to justify or encourage violent acts.

Rabbi David Goldberg (from the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London), Sheikh Musa Admami (Imam of London Metropolitan University) and Paul Oestreicher (Quaker chaplain at Sussex) formed a panel to respond to McTernan’s presentation—and to questions from the audience—from their personal faith perspectives. A lively discussion covered issues such as non-violent responses to terror, the term ‘tolerance’, the role of military chaplains and whether we should be optimistic in the current world situation.

The seminar marked the end of a project headed by Dr Stella Rock, who convenes an annual seminar and mailing list for researchers working on religion, prejudice and conflict. She recently guest edited a special issue on this theme of the quarterly journal Patterns of Prejudice, to be published in June.

Science team talks up an internet games revolution

New technology that lets computer games fans round the world talk as well as play together online makes gaming more friendly, exciting and educational, according to new research.

A team from the Sussex Informatics department carried out a social experiment using Xbox Live, one of the new online computer games packages that employs internet-based audio conferencing, also known as Voiceover Internet Protocol (VoIP). The introduction of VoIP allows users to chat as they play with other gamers around the world at any time, for as long as they like.

The team looked at whether VoIP made the game a more sociable experience. To do this, they invited ten strangers of differing ages, backgrounds and abilities to game together once a week at a regular fixed time over several months. Each was equipped with a broadband connection, a talk-enabled Xbox Live package and several games.

Results revealed that both serious players and people looking to make friends had their experience of gaming enhanced by being able to talk to each other. Chatting made the experience more sociable, while new players were able to learn skills more quickly, either by listening in to more experienced players, or by asking questions. The experiment, conducted by members of the Human Centred Technology (HCT) research group, also highlighted possible design revisions that would improve the social experience of using VoIP. These include positioning voices using stereo to show more clearly their relationship with on-screen characters; boosting the volume for voices that users communicate most with; and designing new types of ‘awareness’ tools so that users know immediately who is talking when, and where they are.

Team leader Dr John Halloran says: “Our research shows that there is genuine potential for the new talk-enabled multiplayer games to help people join in and learn, to have a more vivid experience and even make new friends.

“We feel that with design revisions to VoIP we envisage, the social aspects of online gaming could be developed even further, for example by allowing people to communicate with and recognise each other more easily.”

Xbox Live is a gaming package launched by Microsoft last year. The package is a subscription-based service that relies on a broadband link to the internet. Take-up has been relatively slow in the UK, but Microsoft is hoping to steal the march on rivals Sony and expects more than a million players to be gaming online by June this year. The aim, says Microsoft, is to turn gaming from a solitary experience to a "community" one.

News in brief ↓

Jobsday

Lots of employers with graduate, part-time and vacation opportunities will be at the summer Jobsday on Wednesday (26 May). Organisations that have already confirmed they’ll be there include Loyds TSB, the NHS, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Sussex Police; for full details of who’s attending and their vacancies, see www.sussex.ac.uk/ctec/jobsdayexhibitors. The event takes place on the first floor of Bramber House from 10am-3pm.

Celebration of the life and work of John Maynard Smith

A memorial will be held for Professor John Maynard Smith at 4pm on Saturday 26 June, in the Meeting House. All are welcome to celebrate John’s life and his remarkable contribution to biology. It would be helpful for the Centre for the Study of Evolution to know how many people to expect, so email CSE@sussex.ac.uk if you think you will attend. They will then email further details as they become available.

Director of IES to retire

Richard Pearson, director of the campus-based Institute for Employment Studies, has announced his retirement at the end of 2004, after 12 years in the job. The independent centre for research and consulting in employment and human-resource issues is based in the Mantell building.

New Council members elected

Two members of staff have been elected to serve on the University’s governing body for three years from 1 August. Dr Libby John won the ballot of academic faculty, while Jeremy Maris was re-elected to represent non-academic staff.

Richard Bryant

Richard Bryant, a member of the University Council for 30 years from 1960 to 1990 and a life member of Court, died on 4 May. The University awarded Mr Bryant an honorary doctorate at a special ceremony during the annual meeting of Court in March 1990. The funeral was being held today (21 May) in St Leonards.

Give to the Argus Appeal

Three members of staff—Alison Field, Gill Hall and Trevor Ward—were part of a group that cycled the South Downs Way last week in aid of the Argus Appeal. They need your sponsorship...
Award winner shows other adult learners the way

A student at the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) has won an Adult Learner of the Year Award.

"I wanted to improve myself and make progress in my life," says Georgina Rebera, who received her award from the Mayor of Brighton & Hove in a ceremony this week on the Sussex campus.

Despite having a young family, Georgina has tackled a wide range of open courses with CCE. She used her credits to gain advanced standing on CCE's part-time BA in Cultural Studies and is now in her fifth year of study.

"Georgina has gained a great deal of confidence in the years I have known her," says her tutor, Dr Gerry Holloway. "She is very active in her local community and has used the skills learned on the degree to construct a community website."

Georgina lives in Moulscoomb, just down the road from the University campus. For a module on life history, she interviewed members of the community about their experiences of living on the estate and their contributions to its social fabric. She then used this material to advocate the achievements of these people and promote the strong local community spirit.

Georgina's ultimate ambition is to train as a primary-school teacher. "Being a mother of four and having various work and voluntary commitments, I have to manage my time effectively," she says. "This means that I really value my study time and work hard to meet deadlines."

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The final countdown

With just seconds to go and in danger of missing her most important deadline, this student still somehow manages to smile as hundreds of cheer her on.

The annual dissertation dash has become something of a grand, and uniquely Sussex, tradition. Known variously as the "5 o'clock run" and the 'run of shame', for many students it's a symbol that the end of their studies, and undergraduate days, is close.

Thousands of arts students have to hand in their coursework by 5 o'clock on the same day (3.7 May this year), to the same place (Mandela Hall, handily close to Falmer Bar). Those who have already handed in their work get a great view from the grassy embankments around the Library of those rushing to sneak theirs in before the deadline.

As 5 o'clock draws closer, the cheers get louder. In fact, those who are too cool and stroll towards Falmer House are booted for not providing enough entertainment.

As in previous years, several students did mock runs. These ranged from the classic 'student tripping up and dissertation going everywhere' spectacle, to more imaginative stunts: a car drove two semi-naked students past the crowd to Falmer House, while a man dressed as a giant squirrel was fed a pint before being allowed to continue on his furry way.

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We wish all our students the best of luck with their exams.

University of Sussex
Staff attitudes to be surveyed

All University staff are being urged to complete and return a staff attitude survey during June and early July.

The questionnaire, to be sent out through the internal mail in the first fortnight of June, is intended to measure a whole range of aspects of the University’s organisational culture including management style and effectiveness, pay and recognition, staff development, health, safety and welfare as well as work-life balance, equalities issues, stress and harassment. Human Resources hope that a high proportion of staff will respond.

The survey will be carried out by the Research and Information Division of NHS Partners, formerly Pay and Workforce Research, who have surveyed more than 280 public-sector organisations since they were set up in 1999.

They have recently been involved in a pilot project with nine other universities across Britain, the results of which will allow effective benchmarking and the sharing of relevant information across the higher education sector.

A staff focus group, led by NHS Partners’ Head of Research and Information, Cheryl Kershaw, has already begun the process of designing a suitable questionnaire for Sussex. Human Resources hope that the final draft will be ready in the next ten days, with circulation to all staff following very shortly after.

The last staff survey at Sussex was carried out four years ago by the Industrial Society, amidst criticisms that the results and recommendations were not readily available to staff.

"That will certainly not be the case this time," says Barbara Bush, Director of Human Resources. "The University is fully committed to publishing all data online and to reporting on actions taken as a result of the survey recommendations. All completed forms will be anonymised.

Further surveys are to be carried out every two to three years.

Director of SPRU meets Chinese premier

The director of SPRU - Science and Technology Policy Research met the Chinese premier earlier this month when he flew in to London for a three-day UK tour.

Appropriately enough, Professor Ben Martin discussed British science and technology policy with Wen Jiabao at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in Knightsbridge.

Also present at the high-level meeting were the Science Minister, Lord Sainsbury; the vice-chancellors of six universities; the government’s Chief Scientific Advisor; and the Director General of the Research Councils.

"He was either very well briefed or astonishingly knowledgeable about UK science and innovation," said Ben after the summit. "He was a very impressive man."

SPRU has hosted numerous Chinese delegations in recent years.

First Class

Alison Elliot, a Sussex MSc graduate in Experimental Psychology, has become the first female moderator of the Church of Scotland general assembly. She took up her post, which lasts for one year, on 15 May. Ms Elliot is also the first moderator since the 17th century not to be an ordained minister.

Dr Clive Webb from Sussex and Dr William Carrigan of Rowan University in New Jersey have won the 2003–2004 Arthur Miller Prize for their article 'The lynching of persons of Mexican origin or descent in the United States, 1848 to 1928', published in the Journal of Social History.

CDEC meets the standard

The Career Development & Employment Centre (CDEC) heard last week that it has won national recognition for the standard of its services.

The Matrix standard focuses on delivery and management of the service, including competence of staff; support to students in exploring options and making career choices; and acting on feedback.

CDEC went through a three-day assessment process at the end of April, when the assessor interviewed CDEC staff, students, academic staff and employers.

In his feedback, the assessor praised CDEC for its student-centred attitude and its professional, progressive approach.

The areas of good practice identified by the assessment report include subject-specific career guides; workshops for discrete user groups; the career-vacancy database; and a strong, identifiable brand.

There were also areas for development, not least the problem of access to the first floor of Palmer House for people with mobility difficulties. This particular issue will be addressed by a new lift this summer.

Brian Nisbet, the Director of CDEC, said: "I was confident we would meet the standard, but it is reassuring to have an external measure of the quality of the service."

Staff vacancies 

For further details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/staffing/personnel/vacs or contact staffing services on est. 8706, fax 877401, recruitment@sussex.ac.uk

APPLY BY 26 MAY
Finance Assistant, Finance (ref 631)

APPLY BY 27 MAY
Finance Manager (p/t), Sussex Institute (ref 628)
Manager, Sussex Institute (ref 629)
Technician (p/t), Genome Centre (ref 632)
Finance Manager, SoTech (ref 635)
Clerical Assistant –

Curriculum and Support, SoTech (ref 638)
Research Fellow in Informatics, SoTech (ref 614)
2x Research Support Officers, Research and Regional Development (ref 633)
LETTERS

The conservation of campus wildlife

I thought we were supposed to be an ecologically friendly campus. Can anyone tell me why the ivy was removed from the wall along the front of campus? It had been home to several pairs of nesting blackbirds for a long time. Also, why was the little tree by the pelican crossing (where the new plant arrangement is) disposed of? It would not have been in the way and its blossom was always one of the first signs that spring was on its way.

Sue Gretton, UG Office

Paul Feast, Head of Estates and Infrastructure, replies:
The ivy was removed as it was causing damage to the flint wall. The condition of the wall is being monitored and, if there is further degradation, it will have to be repaired at some point in the future. Care was taken to ensure that removal of the ivy did not occur when nesting was taking place and no birds were disturbed during the removal process. The tree died during the winter and therefore had to be removed.

Why sex is better than cloning

Human cloning on a grand scale could spell the end of the species as we all become nastier, warns a Sussex researcher.

Evolutionary biologist Dr Joel Peck has produced a mathematical model that suggests that asexual reproduction – in which organisms are reproduced from a single parent without fertilisation – leads to antagonistic behaviour within species and, subsequently, population decline.

"For decades evolutionary biologists have wondered why sexual reproduction persists when asexual reproduction seems more efficient," says Joel. "Virtually all species that are now asexual – excluding microbes – were originally sexual. But we have also seen that these asexual organisms are prone to rapid extinction."

Another puzzle has been the role that altruistic behaviour, by which one organism helps another at some cost to itself, plays in the evolution process. Joel explains: "In many species adults help each other, even though this may cause harm to themselves. An example is when a honeybee "commits suicide" by stinging someone attacking its hive. The stinger is left in the attacker and the defending bee dies."

"My theory predicts that, if a species becomes asexual, it will also become progressively nastier so that helpful behaviour almost never occurs. Eventually, this sort of social degeneration can lead to the extinction of the species."

Joel used computer simulation to follow the evolution of hypothetical populations of sexual and asexual organisms for 10,000 generations. The simulations take account of habitat, migration and reproduction. The results showed that, under some conditions, especially when a natural habitat goes into decline, members of sexual populations were three times more likely to survive to reproductive age than asexual populations.

As Joel says, "In sexual organisms, when the going gets tough, the nice go along – they spread out throughout the environment. These nice sorts of individuals then hang around, even after environmental conditions improve. However, under asexuality, niceness doesn't have a chance. The most selfish types seem to take over in an evolutionary blink of an eye."

He adds: "If humans became an asexual population, it seems very likely that we would quickly wipe ourselves out through sheer antagonism."

Joel's computer simulations allow for complex interactions between genes. This is something that has not been represented in computer simulations before, even though such interactions are common in nature.

His research was supported by a £40,000 grant from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC). Joel's paper, 'Sex causes altruism. Altruism causes sex. Maybe?', is published in the 22 May edition of the Proceedings of the Royal Society.

The new logo and the female form

I am almost at a loss for polite words after reading Thomas Austin’s attack (Bulletin 23 April) on David Booth’s observation that the new US logo looks like a pair of breasts. I cannot believe that merely mentioning the word "breasts" is now enough to label someone as contributing to the "social and cultural" obstacles experienced by female academics.

Dr Austin, you are the reason why most tax payers will always see academics as snivelling far-left job-dodgers, and you are contributing to the obstacles of all academics (male and female) with such comments. Shame on you.

Toby Elliman, Psychology

Ducklings dice with death

This picture epitomises an English spring: mallard ducklings, swimming with their mother on the Meeting House moat. Staff and students have been observing the brood – born on 1 May – in recent weeks as they commute between the moat and the Arts A pond.

But nature can be cruel and, days after the photo was taken, the duck and drake were spotted on campus without any of their nine offspring in tow. Normally the youngsters would stay with their mother for up to 60 days.

Dr David Harper, Senior Lecturer in Evolutionary Biology and Bulletin wildlife columnnist, says it’s possible that a fox has taken the lot. “Seagulls and crows also chase the ducklings and may have succeeded in separating them from their mother,” he says.

According to David, it’s not uncommon for a whole brood to be wiped out in this way. And it’s unlikely the pair will have any more ducklings this spring, he says, because incubation takes a whole month. The fact that the couple are still together means that there is a chance, however.

There are at least two other pairs of mallards nesting on campus. David predicts they will attempt to cross the busy A27 to Falmer pond, probably at night, when their broods are in tow. The ponds on campus are very small,” he explains, “and the water is sterile, so there’s not enough food for them. The fish keep the biodiversity quite low, as well."

If they survive the road crossing, some of the ducklings may stay in Falmer, while others may look for somewhere a little quieter. Let’s hope the campus ducklings yet hatch out fare better than the ones in this picture seem to have done.
Gardner Arts Centre

Box office 01273 688561
www.gardnerarts.co.uk
Sussex students and staff are eligible for tickets at concessional rate to all events on presentation of a valid ID card.

FILM
Sun 30 May
8pm
School of Rock (PG)

Wed 2 June
8pm
Dogville (15)

Flicks for free: first Bulletin reader to the

The Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Benedict Brook, with contributions from Jacqui Bealing and Maggie Clare. We welcome any news, story ideas, letters or small ads from the staff and students of the University.

The next issue will be out on 4 June, with a copyspace deadline of 1pm on 28 May. Please contact the Press & Communications Office in Sussex House, ext. 8888 or email bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.

Small ads

Wanted: 2 bed flat or house to rent from end May. Professional couple + young daughter. B'ron Lewes and surrounding areas. Email jackiep@sussex.ac.uk or call Jackie on 730442.

For sale: Toshiba Satellite Pro 2100 Intel Celeron notebook, 1800MHz, 30GB HD, 256MB memory, integrated CD-RW/DVD-ROM, 14" XGA TFT screen. Windows XP Professional, Office 2003. Email offers to ltdickel@sussex.ac.uk.

For sale: Rover 100 Knightsbridge, P reg., 28k miles, tax, MOT. New battery, tyres. Owner's manuals etc. £1,725. Tel. 474907.

For sale: Computer. AMD-K6/66m 3D processor, 32MB RAM, 9.5GB memory. Windows 98, Office 2000, CD burner, modem, 2 USB ports. Monitor, keyboard, mouse, printer. £100ono. Call Anna on 07913 826223 or email alm20@sussex.ac.uk.

To let: 3/4 bed furnished house in Cliffon Terrace. 2 bedrooms, roof terrace, large communal gardens. Suit student academic plus family. £1,650 pcm. From Aug for 1 yr. Email nicholas.rolfe@virgin.net.

For sale: Driftwood, perfect for arts & crafts. Misted box with 40 pieces: £15. Call Petra on ext. 8284 or email: emmoc@onetel.com.

For sale: Diner suit + shirt for medium build, 5'11" £95. Worn only a few times. Tel. Ashley on 07788 257483 or email: leuy@sussex.ac.uk.

To let: Furnished studio flat in Lewes. Available now. £575 pcm inc. Call 487009 (ext).