A year on: Are the new schools working?

It's the right way to go, but there is still too much bureaucracy, too many emails and too many priorities, says a review of the University's new academic structures. "All staff are working very hard but it is not clear that we are always working on projects or issues that best serve our needs," concludes Professor Mary Stuart, the pro-vice-chancellor, who led the review.

Conducted over the summer term 2004, a year after the creation of five new schools, the purpose of the review was to identify areas of success as well as aspects of the new structures that would benefit from improvement.

The review involved meetings with academic managers (deans, directors and heads of department) and with wider groups of faculty and staff. On the positive side, the review found that the new structures have enabled a more strategic approach in the operation of schools and departments and more effective sharing of good practice across campus. The devolution of certain functions (such as curriculum development and management) from the centre to the schools has also been beneficial. In general, staff thought that change had been in the right direction.

The main issue to emerge is the relationship between schools and their departments. Many's report concludes that the balance of administrative support could be more effective (such as schools with large departments) helpfully re-focused towards departments. Schools containing a number of small departments gain efficiency by offering cross-school centralisation of services. It is now for the dean in each school to determine with their school administrative manager how best to allocate their support staff and other resources, in light of the review.

Another review finding is that there continue to be too many meetings at all levels across campus and that many engage in too much detail. In addition, the level of such meetings is sometimes wrongly pitched, with work that could be undertaken at departmental level being passed to school committees. This is a particular concern with committees focusing on curriculum matters. Work is already under consideration to improve the organisation of school and departmental committees.

Where possible, concludes the report, work at departmental level should not be undertaken in a further round of committees, but by individual officers or members of faculty in consultation with heads of department. The level of administrative support for departmental meetings could also be improved.

The review also found that communication from the centre to schools and departments is not well co-ordinated and that there is too much of: deans, SAMs and heads of department sometimes find themselves being used as email post-boxes. Senior managers in the administration are to consider with colleagues how information could better be shared.

The full report has been circulated to the Senior Management Group (SMG) for wider dissemination. The review of the new academic structures will continue this term with an evaluation of examination board structures and a progress update on the report’s recommendations.

Students encouraged to take mumps vaccine

Staff at the University Health Centre are encouraging Sussex students to receive mumps vaccinations.

They are particularly targeting students aged between 18 and 24, only a few of whom will have had an MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine in childhood. Doctors recommend that two doses are needed for protection.

Everyone who comes to the Health Centre is offered the vaccine and hundreds of new students have been vaccinated since the beginning of term. "It is normal for us to take this approach with new students," says Charles Dudley, Director of Student Services. Posters and leaflets around campus alert students and staff to the symptoms of the disease and advise them on receiving vaccination.

Sussex has had one confirmed case of mumps in the past month. "This is not a cause for panic," says Charles, "but it's right to ensure that all students understand and are aware of the situation on campus."

Mumps is caused by a virus, which is transmitted through airborne droplets from the coughs and sneezes of infected people.

It takes about 16-21 days between coming into contact with an infected person and developing symptoms, such as painful swelling of the salivary-producing glands on either side of the face.

Most cases of mumps are mild, but when complications occur they can be serious. About one-quarter of young men with mumps develop an inflammation of one or both testes, which can be very painful and may lead to sterility.

Inside

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What the ordinary 'tommy' really thought about World War I.

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4 Dramarama
Student action go for shocks as well as Shakespeare.

5 Pay packet
The much-heralded 'single pay spine' moves a step closer.

7 Staff survey
The results are in. But what will be done to act on them?
BOOKMARK


The publisher says: "Mechanisms in Organic Reactions helps students to make sensible proposals for the mechanisms of particular organic reactions, and then how to distinguish between different possible mechanisms."

Techniques for this include product studies, kinetics, and the identification of intermediates. Three chapters on intermediates discuss likely points of attack on molecules by anions, radicals and cations, and the important role of acid- and base-catalysed reactions and radical chain reactions. The prediction of reaction rates and the effects of structural changes on reaction rate are also covered.

"The book provides both illuminating insights into fundamental chemistry, and also practical value for students who will go on to teach, research, or be involved in other scientific roles."

George Walter (Senior Lecturer in English) In Flanders Fields Penguin, £12.00 (hardback) ISBN 0143997230

The publisher says: "The poetry of the First World War continues to have a powerful effect on readers of all ages. The all-consuming experience of 'The War that Will End War', in H. G. Wells's famous phrase, inspired a lasting body of work that has yet to be rivaled for its range and intensity."

"Here for the first time is an anthology that reflects the diversity of that experience, bringing together the words of all those who were affected by the war – the poets, the ordinary soldiers, and the civilians left behind. The poems have been arranged thematically according to different stages of the war: from 'the call-up' to assessing the aftermath. This blend of diverse voices and a thematic arrangement is what makes this anthology unique and uniquely moving."

Badgers in your garden?

Badgers are becoming increasingly numerous in urban and suburban habitats. While many householders welcome the presence of badgers and some actively encourage them, they can be a serious nuisance to others. New research at Sussex will investigate the behaviour and ecology of urban badgers, as part of a larger project aimed at developing management guidelines.

The research, led by biologist Professor Tim Roper, asks why some towns have especially large populations of badgers and how the behaviour of urban badgers differs from that of their rural counterparts.

The project will involve collecting data on the locations and characteristics of urban badger sets, and radio-tracking individual badgers that live in urban or suburban areas. The research will focus on the south-east, which is a hot-spot both for urban badgers and for complaints about the problems that they cause.

"Working on urban badgers will be quite challenging," says Tim. "Badgers are wonderful animals and many people are, quite rightly, devoted to them. However, they do cause genuine problems to some householders, for example by destroying their gardens or undermining their houses."

"We need to find better ways of predicting where and when the presence of badgers is likely to become problematic, and of dealing with problems when they arise. The overall aim is to determine the conditions under which badgers and humans can co-exist without too much inconvenience to either species."

Tim would welcome information, which will remain confidential, from anyone who has badgers or a badger sett in their garden. Contact him (ext. 7373, T.J.Roper@sussex.ac.uk) or John Davison (ext. 2764, J.Davison@sussex.ac.uk). The research is funded by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

Tim's previous research on badger behaviour has included their social and territorial habits and, more recently, the vexed question of how they transmit bovine tuberculosis to cattle.

Front pages that portrayed World War I for laughs

Rowan Atkinson's 'Blackadder' offers a more accurate social view of the soldier's experience of World War I than poets such as Wilfred Owen, according to new research.

DPhil student Esther MacCallum-Stewart says the anti-war view offered by soldier poets such as Owen and Siegfried Sassoon is only part of the picture. The ordinary 'Tommy' was actually pro-war, kept a stiff upper lip and didn't talk about the horrors. He looked instead to morale-boosting humour to deal with the grim realities of life in the trenches and indulged a taste for mockery and the absurd, as employed in the BBC comedy series set in World War I, 'Blackadder Goes Forth'.

"Humour helped to relieve the boredom. Most frontline soldiers spent much of their time out of action behind the lines," says Esther. "Blackadder' is subversive without being political. The soldiers of the war would have recognised the stereotyped characters of pomp, inept officers and the lower ranks and would have enjoyed the joke of 'Blackadder' and his sidekicks trying to shirk their duties. It wasn't the war they were against, but the way it was fought."

Esther has studied the ways in which World War I has been depicted down the decades, from poetry and songs to films such as Oh! What A Lovely War! and bestselling books such as Birdsong and the Regeneration trilogy. She says that the way we view World War I was skewed by a renewed interest in it during the 1960s, when poems such as Owen's 'Dulce Et Decorum Est' gained new prominence with the anti-war movement.

To redress the balance so that the real experiences of ordinary men — and women — are included, Esther has collaborated with her supervisor, Dr George Walter, on a new anthology of World War I poetry. In Flanders Field offers work by 67 writers from varied backgrounds. The anthology also includes anonymous popular songs — with all the rude words put back in.

Esther's research, which can be viewed on her weblog www.whatilovelywar.co.uk/war — also led her to the story of the Wipers Times, a spoof newspaper produced on the frontline by soldiers. It included poetry, song lyrics, in-jokes, cartoons, spoof articles and an agony aunt. Even the paper's title is a schoolboy joke: a pun of Ypres and a reference to the paper's final use. It sold by the thousand.
Pro-Vice-Chancellor Mary Stuart’s report on the school restructuring has now been widely circulated.

The key issue that Mary’s report identifies is whether we need to adjust the balance of administrative support between the schools and the departments. There is a widespread feeling, which I share, that initially that balance was tilted too far in the school direction; and that departments, especially their heads, were being given added responsibilities without the necessary administrative support.

We need to address this issue, not by a radical revision of all the new structures, but by looking for adjustments and modifications. I welcome the fact that this process is already under way in many schools.

However, in our current circumstances we need to economise on administrative resources, so we can’t solve the problem by throwing money at it. We must therefore cut down on the administrative burden in schools and departments. Mary’s report makes excellent suggestions on how to reduce the amount of business done by committee. I think we need to pursue this enthusiastically, in the interests of reducing bureaucratic burdens, reducing administrative costs and encouraging innovation.

In my last VC’s voice (8 October), I gave some preliminary responses to the results of the staff attitudes survey. Everyone with managerial responsibility within the University needs to think about how they will respond.

For myself, I draw some clear messages: the need to communicate more clearly what are the University’s central objectives, and to take every opportunity to participate in open discussion. It was good to see so many members of staff attending the open meetings, and participating in such lively discussions on a range of important issues.

I am always willing, and so are all the pro-vице-chenlors, to come to school or department meetings. I do not have a hidden agenda; the University’s objectives are important and we are open about what they are. I am happy to discuss them at any time.

As I have written previously, the longer term outlook for the funding of both teaching and research looks better than it has done for decades. We are therefore investing for the future, both in the creation of new academic posts, and in the improvement of the campus infrastructure. But we cannot afford to run financial deficits greater than those already planned and approved by Council.

It looks likely that this year’s tuition-fee income and research income will fall short of target, so adjustments will be needed to keep our finances on track. Some desirable expenditures will have to be deferred, and significant economies sought. All proposals to re-fill vacant posts will be carefully scrutinised.

Economising is never fun, but it is necessary. The central objective as we make plans for the next two years will be to maintain the momentum of academic investment for the future.

VC’s VOICE

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Vice-Chancellor's open meetings with staff

More than 150 staff attended this term’s open meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith, on Wednesday 27 October and discussed issues ranging from the strategic goals of Sussex to the science curriculum review.

School and department structures

The Vice-Chancellor reported that the review of the new schools, led by Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Mary Stuart, points to the need to improve the balance of support between schools and departments, which Deans and School Administrative Managers (SAMs) are now looking to take forward.

Building developments

Questions about the rationale for the move of IT Services (ITS) from Chichester I to Engineering I, the Vice-Chancellor explained that this is part of wider moves that will bring the Informatics department together in Chichester I. The increased space in Engineering I will provide capacity for any future growth of ITS. The Space Planning Group (SPG) had fully considered the suitability of the space for ITS, although he noted concerns about lighting and ventilation.

A number of staff raised the issue of the extension of the EDB car park in the vicinity of Norwich House (which contains the canteen). The Vice-Chancellor said that there had been consultation in May on the overall development of campus, which included this car park, but that the University had been wrong not to undertake detailed and specific consultation with staff and parents sooner. Construction work has not yet started and discussions are now ongoing.

Staffing issues

On the staff survey, the Vice-Chancellor pointed to areas where work should focus, such as better communication both between and within units, and addressing workload and work-life balance. While there are positives to take from the results, all departments and units need to look hard at what the results mean for them. There are particular staff groups – such as manual staff – where responses had been so small that more work is needed to ensure their concerns are understood.

On pay and grading, the Vice-Chancellor said that work to implement locally the new national framework agreement is taking place in consultation with the trade unions. The objective had been to implement the framework agreement during 2005, but he acknowledged that this is an ambitious target, given the range and complexity of issues involved.

University strategy and finances

On the University’s strategy, the Vice-Chancellor said that Sussex has four clear priorities for the coming year:

1. To strengthen further the University’s research standing in the run up to the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).
2. More needs to be done to build postgraduate and overseas student numbers, address science undergraduate recruitment and continue to tackle drop-out rates.
3. Sussex’s finances are strained and – without the prospect of additional fee income – are not in a sustainable position.
4. The University is unusually dependent on income from government bodies and needs to do more to attract ‘third stream’ monies from outside the state sector.

Questioned on what is being done to address the impact of faculty departures on the RAE scores, the Vice-Chancellor said that science departments are being supported through the period of low-level but high-quality recruitment, while work is done on the science curriculum review. The University is allowing new staff to be recruited despite low student/staff ratios.

In response to a question on the medium-term economic picture for the University, the Vice-Chancellor said that Sussex, like many universities, is running a deficit as a result of historic and chronic under-funding on teaching and research, yet has the prospect of significant new income (an additional £10m a year on an expenditure of around £75m) as a result of a new fees regime.

On Full Economic Costing (FEC), the Vice-Chancellor said that the new system will provide significant new income to Sussex of some £1.5m a year, as research councils will be providing funding that more accurately matches the actual costs of undertaking research. To achieve this, however, the University needs to show the costs involved, and academics keeping diaries of activities undertaken is a necessary part of that.
More shocking than shopping

Learning their lines:
Students rehearse for 'The Importance of Being Earnest'. One of four SUDS plays this term it will be performed from 1-3 December in the Debating Chamber.

If you think student drama is all big frocks, sword battles and rhyming couplets, then watch out — because this term there's less Shakespeare and more sex.

Tackling subjects such as prostitution and drug addiction and containing scenes of homosexuality and drug use, Mark Ravenhill's play 'Shopping and Fucking' certainly isn't a family panto.

But, says Adam Lindsey, a 20-year-old English student and new president of Sussex University Drama Society (SUDS), this is exactly the sort of stuff student drama should be highlighting.

"Universities are where explicit, thought-provoking, shocking plays should be done. As far as I'm concerned nothing is too controversial for a play." But won't the audience just be scared away? "For a lot of people it's shocking, but these things are happening every day. This play reflects the anguish and struggles of young people."

Is Adam getting excited about this term's other productions? "I'm really looking forward to the scale of 'Macbeth'," he says, "and the cast and crew of 'Wuthering Heights' are breaking the mould. It could be the best SUDS play for a while." The group will also be staging Oscar Wilde's classic, 'The Importance of Being Earnest'.

SUDS are aiming to stage a total of 12 shows this year, which seems plenty. But Adam and his team have their sights higher — and further north: "Most people in university drama don't end up as professional actors," he says, "so the biggest stage an amateur performer can be on is Edinburgh."

A committee to oversee preparations has already been set up: venues are being investigated, suitable plays pored over and funding options looked at, with the aim of SUDS staging a show at the world-famous festival in August 2005.

"People learn so much being in Edinburgh. Their acting abilities improve overnight," says Adam. He adds: "The University is now doing drama courses and we should up there in Edinburgh every year showing off Sussex and why it's so good to come here."

But even if they don't make it across the border, what can SUDS bring to a student's university experience? For Adam, it's all about life skills: "confidence, speaking to groups, communication". Plus, he adds, "Employers can see that people are dedicated and enthusiastic."

Shopping and Fucking will be staged from Wednesday (10 November) to Friday (12 November) in the Debating Chamber, Falmer House at 6.45pm. Tickets are £5. For details of this term's other plays, look out for the posters around campus or see the events listings in the Bulletin and on the Sussex website.

Thanks for the past, hope for the future

South Africa could become a role model for the world on how to close the gap between rich and poor, a government minister said in a lecture on campus last week.

Sussex graduate Essop Pahad, now a South African cabinet minister, said that President Thabo Mbeki (also a Sussex alumnus) had "nailed his colours to the mast of realistically engineering the transfer of resources from the rich to the poor, both nationally in South Africa and especially globally". He added: "The project is to end poverty, foster development and merge our two economies (one rich and largely white and the other poor and black) into one."

The minister said his lecture stemmed from an obligation to report back to the institution that had done so much to help him achieve his present role in government. Throughout his visit on 26 October, Mr Pahad spoke fondly about his time as a Sussex postgraduate in the late 1960s. On a pre-lecture campus tour, he pointed out the exact spot in the Students' Union bar where he had first chatted up the woman who is now his wife.

His charm was not lost on the lecture audience either, as he praised and thanked Sussex — both the institution and its students — for being consistently active in the struggle against apartheid and for educating so many South African MPs. (There have been more Sussex graduates in the South African parliament than the British one.)

After the lecture, invited guests were taken to the Gardner Arts Centre to see a performance of 'Like Doves We Rise' by South African group Amajuba. "With its stories of the pain and anguish suffered under apartheid, but its expression of hope for the future, it was a fitting way to round off the evening," said Dr Alan Lester, acting director of the Centre for Southern African Studies.

Schools to sample science at Sussex

Next week sees the launch of a new Sussex initiative to raise the profile of science, technology and engineering to a new generation of prospective students.

Taking place on Wednesday (10 November) in Bramber House, the first 'Science at Sussex' afternoon includes demos and displays where pupils in years 11, 12 and 13 can browse, ask questions and meet current undergraduates.

They can then attend any two subject-specific sessions, led by academics who aim to dazzle rather than blind with science and give an insight into what studying their subject at university entails.

The programme, catering both for students who have already decided on their future study area and those yet to finalise their route, will introduce subjects beyond the usual school curriculum, such as artificial intelligence, biochemistry, engineering and product design.

Sussex is overhauling its science curriculum and styles of delivery to ensure it remains up to date, relevant and attractive to the scientists of tomorrow.
Disruption, pollution and environmental desecration

Contrary to the Vice-Chancellor's reassuring words quoted in the Bulletin report (22 October) on plans to build a new 92-space car park, many people are not convinced that their concerns are being taken seriously.

The car park, adjacent to the Russell Building and Norwich House, threatens to bring disruption, pollution and environmental desecration in its wake. It will affect the living and working conditions of adults and children in the campus creche, students in Norwich House, and anyone on campus who enjoys the green spaces so often trumpeted in the University's own publicity material.

In correspondence and meetings with staff, the Vice-Chancellor has admitted that it was a "mistake" not to consult properly with the campus community before pressing ahead with this scheme.

However, he has also suggested that concerns about the car park are overstated. For those who think otherwise, a petition against the scheme is available to sign in Norwich House, at other locations on campus, or by request from t.r.austin@sussex.ac.uk.

Dr Thomas Austin,
Humanities

The personal approach to doctoral vivas

It is sometimes refreshing to see how things are done differently elsewhere. Recently, I was invited to a viva voce for the degree of doctor in Psychology at the Free University of Amsterdam. As in other European countries (e.g. Italy), the viva is public, i.e. it is witnessed by the supervisor(s), friends, colleagues and family.

It is a slightly more ceremonious affair than in the UK, as five experts in the field have already declared the thesis satisfactory. After one hour of questions, the panel and the candidate leave the room to deliberate on the performance. They come back and the candidate is congratulated, the degree is presented, and personal speeches are made by the dean of the school and the supervisor, reflecting on the candidate's development over the years. The entire time the language is rather official, with a special formula for the candidate to utter at the end, like a Hippocratic oath.

A reception to congratulate the candidate follows. I was amazed to see departmental colleagues burst into a song about the candidate, followed by another personal speech by the head of department.

It is an opportunity for the candidate to celebrate many years of hard work: it isn't often that someone obtains a doctorate and the Dutch system shows its appreciation for postgraduates.

It was thanks to my friend Dr Catherine Lido in Life Sciences that colleagues came to the Pevensey tea bar after my Sussex viva, making the celebration personal and memorable. As we both got our DPhils in 2003, we attended the 2004 winter graduation ceremony together — but this is rare. In that sense, the more personal Dutch approach is so much nicer than the 'conveyor belt' affair in the UK.

Dr Nathalie van Meurs,
Psychology

Fallen tree reveals its canopy secrets

When an ash tree came tumbling down onto Engineering I during the high winds of 21 October, it divulged some unexpected new information about wildlife on campus.

The canopy turned out to be heaving with aphids (a family of small insects that live by sucking sap from plants), which were being eaten by cream-spotted ladybirds.

"We haven't had records of these ladybirds in this number for 20 years on campus," said an excited Dr David Harper, Senior Lecturer in Evolutionary Biology. They have previously been found in low-growing vegetation on campus, but it now seems that they might spend most of their time in the canopy.

Campus biologists also had a good look at the gall insects in the canopy. These creatures make their home inside the leaves and create swellings on the foliage called 'galls.' The tree contained every type of gall insect that you could expect to find in an ash in this part of the country," said David.

The biologists will be giving the information they collected about the fallen ash to Brighton and Hove City Council, which has set up a nature-recording service for the local area.

EDB car park

Discussions between Estates project managers and parents concerned about a planned extension to the EDB car park continue, following a further court challenge by a concerned parent. Brighton County Court heard a second application on Wednesday 27 October for an injunction to stop the works going ahead, after the first had been turned down a week earlier.

The court has now timetabled a full hearing for January, subject to an independent report being conducted on the health and safety of the works.

The court stopped short of issuing an interim injunction, so there is no legal ban on works going ahead. However, the University has said it wants discussions with parents to continue before it proceeds.

"We recognise parents' concerns and are in discussion with them to look at what amendments to the scheme might be possible," says Martin Green, Head of Projects and Development. "The health and safety of the construction and use is sound, as we believe we have demonstrated to parents. But we want the independent review that the court has suggested to go ahead as soon as is possible, and we will abide fully by its findings."

Work had been due to begin on 18 October on the extension, which will replace some of the parking spaces lost in creating a new teaching building and student residences across the road from Bramber House.

Representatives of parents of children in the creche remain concerned about the plans and have raised questions about the need for these replacement spaces as well as wider transport strategy.

Estates teams are offering a range of potential improvements to the current car park design — including dedicated creche drop-off points and removal of any spaces from within a set distance from the creche boundary.
IT's the end of Sussex for Mickey

When Mickey Phillips closed down her computer yesterday (Thursday 4 November) it marked the end not only of her career at Sussex but also her whole family's close association with campus.

For 28 years she has been a programmer in what is now IT Services. But the family’s connections with Sussex began much earlier, with both her brothers gaining degrees from the University.

A quarter of a century ago Mickey even held her wedding right here, at the Meeting House. “It was such a lovely place to get married,” she says, “and when the ceremony was over we had a few barrels of beer and a great party downstairs.” Both her children also attended on-campus childcare services.

When she arrived on campus in 1977, working practices in Administration Data Processing – as her unit was called then – were not quite as advanced as now.

“It took weeks or sometimes months to write a program,” recalls Mickey. “We would type it into a machine, which produced a printout that was used to create punch cards. They would be taken over to Computing Services and fed into another machine. If it didn’t work we’d have to do it all over again. Today we can quite happily write a program in a day.”

Mickey was part of the team responsible for maintaining many central University IT systems. Recently, she worked with colleagues in Human Resources, Schools and Colleges Liaison, CDEC and other units, setting up and installing new software.

In her almost three decades at Sussex, what changes has she noticed? “Sussex has got much bigger. It used to be a very small community and it has lost that – but that’s natural.” It’s the loss of the Sussex House common room that Mickey laments most. “We used to have a quarter-hour tea break; it was very sociable and great for communicating what was happening. But now if it’s raining we eat at our desks and end up not taking proper screen breaks.”

Now Mickey has left Falmer, she intends to keep on going – all the way around Britain, in fact. She lived in the States for a while before she came to Sussex and is keen to be out on the road again with her husband and two dogs. We wish her well on her travels.

FIRST CLASS

Brighton Institute of Modern Music (BIMM), whose degrees are validated by the University of Sussex, won the Education in the Community award at the inaugural Brighton & Hove Business Awards last month. The award is sponsored jointly by the Universities of Sussex and Brighton and the winner was chosen by an independent panel. The judges were impressed by BIMM’s innovative and hands-on approach, the strong placement links it has forged with local companies, and its encouragement of BIMM students to launch their careers locally.

A former Sussex research student has received a prestigious biannual award, given by the Central Bank of Venezuela (BCV) for outstanding research in economics. Emilio Medina-Smith, who completed his economics DPhil in 2003, won the $5,000 Ernesto Peltzer Award for the Spanish translation of a chapter of his doctoral thesis. His colleagues at the University of Carabobo are delighted that the honour has gone for the first time to an academic from a university outside Caracas, the capital of Venezuela.

Sending news of the prize to Professor Michael Sumner, his DPhil supervisor at Sussex, Emilio wrote: “This award belongs also to you for such a good supervision, I would have never been able to win this award if it hadn’t been for your superb guidance.”

Putting new pay and grading arrangements in place

If you think that trade union representatives and Human Resources colleagues are having even more meetings this year than usual, you’re right. Together with a range of other colleagues from across the University, they will be working on implementing new pay and grading arrangements. These arrangements will affect every single member of staff at Sussex.

The ‘Framework Agreement’ and the ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ are the documents that were agreed nationally in the last academic year and all universities are now implementing them locally.

The agreements are based on providing equity and fairness of pay across all university staff, and should make the current pay structures and grades clearer and easier to understand and manage. There will still be a national pay spine, but with common steps and grading across different staff groups.

Sussex is hoping to move all staff on to a new pay and grading structure from August 2005. Establishing what the new grading structure should be for Sussex and moving from the current arrangements is a complex process. The University has set up a number of working groups involving staff and trade union representatives to steer this work.

The new grading structures will have to be supported by a sound process of job evaluation, and this will be one of the first processes to be sorted out by the working groups. They will also look at harmonisation of terms and conditions, in particular for staff working defined hours, which is formally required under the national agreement.

Barbara Bush, Director of Human Resources, said: “This is a tremendous opportunity to create a pay and grading system that is right for Sussex. It should help us remove artificial barriers between different groups and improve opportunities for all our staff.” She added, “This does represent one of the biggest changes for many years and getting this right is vital. To do this we are working in partnership with our trade union colleagues.”

Jeremy Maris said, on behalf of trade unions Amicus, AUT and UNISON: “We’ve voted to accept the national agreement and we’re determined to make it work locally, for the benefit of all staff. We hope that everyone will take the opportunity to contribute so that we get it right – it will have far-reaching consequences for years to come.”

Further information and updates will be provided to staff during this term and throughout the year. Human Resources expect that there will be a lot of questions from staff about the process and the outcomes. A pay and grading newsletter, open meetings and dedicated website for up-to-date information are all planned. As detailed proposals are developed they will be subject to normal consultation and negotiation through the existing arrangements.
Action on the staff survey

As staff across the University take in the results of the staff survey, they are keen to know what action will follow.

The last survey, conducted in 1999, suffered from lack of any effective follow-up and Barbara Bush, Director of Human Resources, is very conscious of the need for this happening again.

"We need to show what is being changed as a result of the responses from over 1,000 staff here," says Barbara. "Part of the challenge is that the survey produced such detailed information. There are also lessons for all units across campus, as well as the University management as a whole."

The new Chancellor has already made his commitment to action clear at his open meetings with staff. "I was struck most of all by the lack of explicit support from staff for the University's strategic direction," he said. "I personally will have to do more to get out and make sure staff know what the goals and priorities of the University are."

Human Resources are committed to specific action to improve staff awareness of key HR policies, including making improvements to the HR website. They aim to improve and expand the range of training on change management and stress management that is available for staff. They will look to management in schools, departments and the administration to improve the take-up of training linked to teams' own objectives. In line with the Vice-Chancellor’s own commitment, appraisal reviews for staff will in future have to explicitly take account of the University’s strategic objectives.

More fundamentally, Human Resources staff will be working with the management team of each school and administration unit to focus on the key survey findings for their part of the University and develop an action plan to address the main challenges for them. Personnel officers will then support them in implementing the plan and feed back progress to the Human Resources Committee.

As Barbara points out, "While there is much for teams at the centre to do, one of the big lessons from the survey is that management at all levels and in all areas across the University need to raise their game. Unless we all attend to what the survey has to say, there will be little chance of making real progress."

There is further action on the staff survey itself. Almost no respondents identified themselves as manual staff and participation by clerical staff was also low. Human Resources are setting up group meetings with manual and clerical staff, supported by NHS Partners (who conducted the main survey), to ensure that their views and concerns are fully understood and to improve survey responses next time.

Staff survey: Internal communications

The Communications Division will be taking a lead on action to improve internal communication, which the survey has identified as a key problem for Sussex. A number of potential systems improvements have already been identified, such as wider use of computer screensavers, which have proved very effective in the administration, and better organisation and management of information on the web.

One of the biggest bug-bears is email overload. Protocols for email use are being finalised, and senior managers will be asked to consider if these should be given a formal policy backing to allow them to be enforced more strictly.

Good-practice advice on internal communications is being developed for use by teams across the University and that should include improving consultation with staff in advance of new developments. In addition, the Vice-Chancellor’s open meetings with staff this term have already seen some further improvements in response to survey feedback.

Within the administration, consideration is being given to a system of managers’ briefings – short, regular, written briefings to reduce the information load on managers in schools and departments and enable them to keep up to speed with central developments.

Senior managers in the administration are also looking at developing a timetable to show when and where key requests for information are being made to schools, to help co-ordinate such activity.

Director of Communications, Rob Read, says: "We want to make sure centrally that we focus efforts on key priority issues and get internal communications right on them, as well as improving our communications systems. But this can only be one part of wider improvements. Teams need to think about how they are communicating with other teams, and managers with their own staff."

BITEBACK ←
What do you think the University should be doing in response to the staff survey? What are you now doing that is different? Have your say by emailing bitedback@sussex.ac.uk. Emails must be from a Sussex address but you can ask to be anonymous.

News in brief ↓

Spring timetable now online

The teaching timetable for the spring term was published on 29 October. Hard work by staff, earlier planning and the new timetable structure now enables future terms’ timetables to be produced much sooner than before. This should help departments’ own planning and be of benefit to students. Staff can print or download it at www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/soo/teaching/teaching-timetable.xls. Departmental timetabling contacts are the best point of call for any further advice and information.

Less speed, more safety

Staff at the Freeman Centre have welcomed the new traffic chorine and loading bay that has been created outside the building. The one-way chorine provides a much safer crossing place than before and also helps to slow traffic as it enters campus. The new arrangements are the result of monitoring potential campus accident spots, and part of wider moves to improve pedestrian access and road safety on campus.

Modernism and the new technologies

A leading authority on literary modernism and post-modernism opened the 2004–5 series of lectures and workshops for the Centre for Modernist Studies. Professor Marjorie Perloff from Stanford University in the USA explored the responses of writers and artists to the coming of the First World War, looking in particular at avant-garde groupings in Russia, Italy and France. The rest of the series of events will consider the impact of early 20th-century technologies – including photography, film and radio – on modernist literature and culture.

All articles are also featured on the internet at www.sussex.ac.uk/press_offices/bulletin
Academic events

MON 8 NOV
12.30pm CCE forum: Geoffrey Mead (Sussex), Downland homes by the sea: Aspects of an interwar Brighton suburb. Arts D340.
3pm Seminar: Magnus Pyner (Birmingham), The coming crisis of the euro. Arts C233.
5pm Open seminar: Mike Younger (Cambridge), Raising boys achievements within an inclusive context? Arts D640.

TUE 9 NOV
12noon Centre for Life History Research seminar: Linda Grace and Richard Bryant (Lindfield History Project), History in the making. Library meeting room.
3pm Rights, Justice, Violence and War seminar: Andy Storey (University College Dublin), Europe and Africa: Towards the law of the jungle? Arts A71.
4.15pm Anthropology seminar: David Morgan (Valparaiso, USA), The popular reception of visual media in the late 19th-century US. Arts D510.
4.30pm Centre for German-Jewish Studies seminar: Gerd Kierschevski (Portsmouth) and Ulla Spittler (Brighton), Remembering the past in united Germany. Arts B127.
6.30pm Professorial lecture: Trevor Beebee (Sussex), Genes, populations and wildlife conservation. BMS Lecture Theatre.

WED 10 NOV
1pm IDS seminar: Farhana Yamin (IDS), Climate change and development. IDS 121.
2pm Music seminar: Richard Attree (Northbrook), Media music composition: Writing music to a brief. Falmer House music room.
4pm Migration seminar: Elke Thielen (Sussex), International burdensharing and refugee protection. Arts C233.
4.30pm History of Art seminar: Leila McKellen (Sussex), Re-embodying the Madonna and Child. Arts A103.
7.45pm Archaeological Society: Peter Brewitt (Sussex), The Caribbean before Columbus: Some results from 20 years of excavations. Arts A1.

FRI 12 NOV
4.30pm Philosophy Society: Lucy Alias (Sussex), Kant's idealism and the Secondary Quality. Arts C233.
SAT 13 NOV

MON 15 NOV
12.30pm CCE Forum: Wil Piffard (Sussex), Geography and education 1930s: The Land Utilisation Survey of Great Britain. Arts D340.
3pm Seminar: Jan Selby ( Aberystwyth/Sussex), The contrasting
10am CCE symposium: Sussex University Drama Society (SUDS) - Shopping and Fucking
2pm Music seminar: Nicolas Ioannidis (Sussex), The Western musical mentality vs that of the Mediterranean world and the Middle East, Falmer House recital room.
4pm Migration seminar: James Hampshire (Sussex), Citizenship and belonging in the post-war Britain. Arts C233.
3.40pm History of Art seminar: Dog in Cusas (SOAS), Visual and material cultures of text in Ming China. Arts A103.

THU 18 NOV
4pm SPT seminar: Angoina Momoh (Frelimo), On Gadamer and philosophy of science. Arts D630.
5pm New Metaphysical Poetry: Elaine Feinstein (poet, novelist, biographer), The genius of Anna Akhmatova. GAC music room.
5pm Open seminar: Diana Cohen (King's College), Researching effective adult literacy. Arts D640.

TUE 16 NOV
12.30pm Centre for Life History seminar: Alan Mann (Oxford), Approaches to writing family history. Library meeting room.
4.15pm Anthropology seminar: Dimitria Mitrokotsa (Sussex), Migration processes among Bulgarians. Arts D510.

FRI 19 NOV
2.15pm SPRU/CENTRIM seminar: Polly Thornton (South East England Development Agency), An education and enterprise led regeneration strategy, Freeman Centre G2/G25.

SAT 20 NOV
1pm CCE forum: Wil Piffard (Sussex), Geography and education 1930s: The Land Utilisation Survey of Great Britain. Arts D340.
3pm Seminar: Jan Selby (Aberystwyth/Sussex), The contrasting
10am CCE symposium: Sussex University Drama Society (SUDS) - Shopping and Fucking
2pm Music seminar: Nicolas Ioannidis (Sussex), The Western musical mentality vs that of the Mediterranean world and the Middle East, Falmer House recital room.
4pm Migration seminar: James Hampshire (Sussex), Citizenship and belonging in the post-war Britain. Arts C233.
3.40pm History of Art seminar: Dog in Cusas (SOAS), Visual and material cultures of text in Ming China. Arts A103.

Small ads

For sale: Xerox M760 colour printer £15. Black inkjet cartridge (51645A) £5. T 270810, ext. 7886, e. gref@ sussex.ac.uk.
For sale: Professional draughtsmen's table, 170x100cm, inc. overhead lamp, stool, etc. £200.00. T 472831.
For sale: BMW M5 alloy wheels, 15in 225/55s 15in tyres, Set of 4: £200. T Vassilis on 07968 743124 or E v Stefanis@ sussex.ac.uk.
For sale: Rover Metro 100 Knightbridge. P reg. (97). New MoT, taxed. 28.5km miles. £1,950 ono. T 47/4907.

Arts events

PERFORMANCE
Sat 6 Nov
7pm Daredevel Opera - Cirkus Inferno Circus skills, pyrotechnic effects and old-fashioned stunts for everyone aged 5-105. GAC
Tue 9 Nov
8pm Forced Entertainment - Bloody Mess Political pop art, visual spectacle that describes the modern world in its beauty, horror and complexity. GAC
Wed 10 Nov - Fri 12 Nov
6.45pm Sussex University Drama Society (SUDS) - Shopping and Fucking Mark Ravenhill's controversial debut play, See our feature in this issue. Debating Chamber, Falmer House.
Wed 17 Nov
10am CCE symposium: Sussex University Drama Society (SUDS) - Wuthering Heights A new student-written adaptation of Emily Bronte's classic. Debating Chamber, Falmer House.
Fri 19 Nov
8pm The Clonimoondelyes & The Featherstonehoughs Leo Anderson's two contemporary dance companies swap gender to perform Flesh & Blood plus Double Take. GAC.

FILM
Sun 7 Nov
7pm Andre Rublev (12) GAC.
Sun 14 Nov
6pm Blue Gate Crossing (12A) GAC.
8pm 16 Years of Alcohol (18) GAC.

EXHIBITIONS
Until Fri 26 Nov
Mon-Sat
10am-6pm Trish Morrissey: New Works. Photography inspired by family photo albums and family relationships. GAC.