Sussex students to be asked views in National Survey

After extensive piloting and consultation, this term sees the launch of the new National Student Survey (NSS), with students at Sussex being surveyed in the week beginning 24 January.

All final-year undergraduate students will be asked to provide feedback on a range of topics, including: quality of teaching; assessment and feedback; academic support; organisation and management; learning resources; and personal development.

The NSS is part of the new system of quality assurance for higher education, which replaces subject review by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The NSS is designed to run alongside QAA institutional audit, to generate more detailed public information about teaching quality.

The intention is that results will be published in summer 2005 as part of the new Teaching Quality Information website, to help future students in their decision-making processes in choosing what courses or institutions they wish to attend. They are also likely to feature prominently in future higher education league tables.

As part of the efforts to ensure students at Sussex are encouraged to respond, all finalists will shortly be receiving a message about the survey sent jointly by the University and the Students’ Union.

Owen Richards, Academic Registrar, said: “Both the University and the Students’ Union see real potential value in the survey, to supplement the work of the student representatives by highlighting the areas where our students think we are currently doing well, or could do better. We very much want all final-year students to take part.”

It will be important that as many students as possible provide their feedback, for the survey to generate reliable information. HEFCE (the Higher Education Funding Council for England) have said that within any given subject area in an institution they are aiming for a response rate of at least 50% for the data to be deemed sufficiently robust to publish.

The NSS will be conducted by an independent national organisation (Ipsos) via a website questionnaire. Ipsos will contact final-year students by email, inviting them to complete the survey online.

For further information, contact Owen on ext. 7019, email o.m.richards@sussex.ac.uk, or see www.thestudentsurvey.com.

Tsunami grief for Attenborough family

Members of the University community were shocked and saddened by the news that three members of the Attenborough family had perished on 26 December in the Asian tsunami. Lord Attenborough, the Chancellor of the University, lost his daughter Jane, herself a Sussex graduate, his granddaughter Lucy and Jane’s mother-in-law, Jane Holland.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alasdair Smith, said: “The thoughts of all of us are with Richard and Sheila Attenborough and their family.”

“In his long association with the University of Sussex, Richard Attenborough’s internationalism, generosity of spirit, and personal warmth have inspired us and touched our hearts. I have written on behalf of the University to Richard and Sheila to express our collective sadness and our hope that the love and support of all their friends around the world touch their hearts at this time.”

Jane, 49, the elder daughter of Lord and Lady Attenborough, was with her husband, Michael Holland, and family at the Thai beach resort of Phuket. Her other daughter, 17-year-old Alice, was treated in hospital. Her husband and son escaped unjured.

Jane studied sociology at Sussex from 1974–77. Her elder brother Michael, the artistic director at London’s Almeida theatre, is also a Sussex graduate. Her sister Charlotte is an actress. They were all present at the installation of Lord Attenborough as the University’s Chancellor in 1999.

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Online learning launched

As part of the work supporting the consultation on a campus-wide e-learning strategy, Information Technology Services (ITS) and the Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TLDU) are collaborating to launch a software system for online collaborative learning activities.

The Learning Activity Management System (LAMS) is a next-generation online learning environment that helps lecturers to design, manage and deliver online collaborative learning activities. These can include individual tasks, small-group work and whole-class projects based on both content and collaboration.

LAMS is very easy to use and it is not necessary to learn HTML or any other programming languages. Lecturers can quickly and easily change sequences by using a ‘drop and drag’ feature, and can easily adapt their lesson plans for different topics, and share these with colleagues.

The inventor of LAMS, Professor James Daizel from Macquarie University in Sydney, Australia, visited Sussex in November to demonstrate the system to a broad range of academic and support staff. The response was very universally encouraging that Dr Rose Luckin, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for learning and teaching, immediately set this collaboration between ITS and the TLDU in motion.

LAMS is released as ‘open source software’, meaning that costs are very low and Sussex developers can readily integrate the environment into existing IT infrastructure.

If you are interested in using LAMS with your students, contact Ley Robinson in TLDU on ext. 7820 or Simon Shunville of ITS on ext. 3319.

Geographer’s pebbles provide artist’s inspiration

Johanna Berger, a practising artist in Brighton, spent some of the autumn term in the Geography department attending lectures, talking to staff and students and seeking inspiration for new works.

She produced two very different pieces of work; one is a drawing of Everest, in keeping with her interest in and previous paintings of mountains.

A second work involves the resin pebbles used by Dr Uwe Dornbusch in his work on coastal erosion processes. The resin pebbles with copper plugs are released onto various stretches of the coast here and in France. Johanna has inserted fragments of love poems into some of these pebbles, and they may now be lying on a beach near you, waiting to be found.

Project explores benefits of gallery learning

Sussex is one of four universities taking part in an 18-month programme of research into the impact of galleries on education. Each institution was chosen because of its links with local galleries and its involvement in visual arts, gallery and education research.

Staff in the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) will be working with Fabrica, the Towner Art Gallery and the De La Warr Pavilion on the en-quire programme, which will fund additional projects for schools.

These will explore how school children benefit from gallery visits, for example in learning about timetable subjects and extra-curricular topics.
VC's VOICE

For all of us, the ‘festival season’ will have been dominated by the unfolding tragedy in the Indian Ocean. The full scale of this human catastrophe is hard for any of us to comprehend.

All members of the University community will have been particularly saddened by the tragic loss of Jane and Lucy Holland, daughter and granddaughter of our Chancellor, and of Lucy’s paternal grandmother. The thoughts of all of us are with Richard and Sheila Attenborough and their family. In his long association with the University of Sussex, Richard Attenborough's internationalism, generosity of spirit, and personal warmth have inspired us and touched our hearts. At this time, I hope that the love and support of all of Richard and Sheila's friends around the world will touch their hearts.

Many students and staff will have friends, relatives and colleagues who have been directly affected. And we all reflect on the many thousands of our fellow human beings who have died, and the many more who are bereaved or destitute.

The University and the Institute of Development Studies have many strong links with the countries around the Indian Ocean and some of our students and faculty are actively engaged in relief operations.

As an international community dedicated to the application of knowledge to the improvement of the human condition, we will want to reflect on the implications of these events for international public policy; the respective roles of private and private aid, and of international organisations and national governments, and the special vulnerability of the poorest to the impact of a natural disaster.

We should think about the role of science in helping us cope with natural events we cannot control, reflect on the fact that we are not—even with all our command of scientific knowledge—the masters of the global environment, and perhaps learn to take a more humble view of our interaction with our planet.

Last month (Bulletin 3 December), I wrote about the financial pressures to which the University is currently subject and our plans to respond to these pressures. We are making progress with taking forward what I have come to think of as the 2005 Savings Review and work is well under way to establish tough but fair savings targets for all spending units, including capital expenditure.

We need to focus on identifying which activities are core to the purposes of the University and need to be protected, and which are ‘nice to have’ but not essential. In all parts of the budget, the overall common themes will be an increase in efficiency and a reduction of waste, including the waste of staff time on excessive bureaucracy. Staff savings can be made only if workloads are reduced and external help will be given in streamlining our administrative processes, especially within schools.

I am pleased with progress so far and the positive spirit in which the discussions are taking place. Council at the end of last term noted that undergraduate applications for entry in 2005 have increased well above the national growth rate for the third year in a row. Preparations for the 2007/8 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) are making very promising progress. There is every reason to be optimistic about the long-term academic strength of the University—but we need to make sure that our academic strength is supported by a robust financial plan.

New appointments

SPRU – Science and Technology Policy Research

Professor Michael Gibbons (director of SPRU from 1992–96) has been appointed to act as consultant on the strategic development of SPRU – Science and Technology Policy Research for a period of up to two years. A search and appointment process for the appointment of a new director will be carried out in the light of this strategic development work.

Professor Joe Tidd, deputy director of SPRU, will be responsible for organisational matters concerning SPRU that would normally be the responsibility of the director. Professor Gibbons will attend Senate and the University’s Senior Management Group meetings.

Professor Ben Martin completed his term as director of SPRU in October 2004.

Head of Secretariat

Paul Baker, currently in the Registrar and Secretary's Office at the University of Birmingham, has been appointed as Head of Secretariat, succeeding Dr John Gaunt who retires on 31 January. Paul will also formally act as Secretary to Council, Senate and Court, pending the appointment of a new Registrar & Secretary.

Interim Admin Team arrangements

Following the early retirement of Neil Gershon as Registrar & Secretary at the end of December 2004, interim arrangements are being established to co-ordinate the work of the administration until a new appointment is made.

Steve Pavey, Director of Finance, will chair the fortnightly meetings of the Admin Team, which includes the Directors of Academic Support, Communications, Estates, Human Resources, Planning, Research Services and Student Services, and the Academic Registrar. The School Administrative Managers (SAMs) will also meet with the Admin Team each month.

To ensure effective involvement of senior administrators within senior management planning and decision making, Owen Richards, the Academic Registrar, will join Steve Pavey and Anthony Young, Director of Planning, as part of the Vice-Chancellor’s Office and Senior Management Group (SMG). Steve, Owen and Anthony will also lead work with Admin Team colleagues on developing the administration's contribution to the spending review.

As an Acting Registrar is not being appointed, line-management arrangements for Admin Team members and others who reported directly to the Registrar & Secretary are being agreed with each person individually.

LETTERS

Thanks for the good wishes

Through your columns may I thank all those people who have written, telephoned and spoken to me personally for all their good wishes on my retirement from the University. I have been truly astonished and humbled by the number of messages I have received, ranging from those with whom I worked closely to those with whom I hardly ever met. I shall take away many warm memories of my five years at the University, above all of the people who make it work.

With my kindest regards to all,
Neil Gershon,
former Registrar & Secretary

FIRST CLASS

Deborah Sharley, the University Librarian, has received a fellowship from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP).

Sussex graduate Alexandra Shulman, editor of British Vogue, was made an OBE in the New Year Honours list. Shulman studied social anthropology at Sussex from 1977–80. Since her appointment in 1992, Vogue’s circulation has risen to more than 200,000 copies a month.
Meeting House vows: It was an all-Sussex affair at the Meeting House on 18 December when Shell Morgan (Student Experience Co-ordinator) married Professor Paul Lister (head of the Informatics department) in an intimate candle-lit ceremony. The University Chaplain, Canon Dr Gavin Ashenden, officiated and official wedding photographer was Keith Hunt.

Small ads

To let: 1-bed G/F flat in Newhaven. Quiet, refurbished. Available till end Mar. £160 p/w, no bills. E m.j.bioce@ sussex.ac.uk.

For sale: 2 Alva stereo speakers. £10 ono. Ext. 7966 or E h.b.j.brook@sussex.ac.uk.


Wanted: Vocalist-lyricist for collaborations, 4-piece band with wide musical tastes. Lots of backings written/recorded waiting for melody & lyrics. T Tom on 07944 459924 or E carolina_bollersen@hotmail.com.

Academic events

TUE 11 JAN 4.30pm American Studies seminar: Bruce Baker (Royal Holloway). Is firmly moderate position: Katherine Du Pre Lompton’s lost novel and the Southern Front’s vision of reconstruction. Arts A155.

FRI 14 JAN 2.15pm SPRU-CENTRIM seminar: Erhard Geissler, Biological ‘weapons of mass disappearance’: Lessons from German history. Freeman Centre Q24/G25.

MON 17 JAN 5pm Geography seminar: Dominic Kineton (Sussex), Water and ecosystems resources in regional development: Balancing societal needs and wants and natural resources systems’ sustainability in international river basin systems. Arts C175.

TUE 18 JAN 12noon Biochemistry and Genetics seminar: Alan Rickson (Birmingham), Epstein-Barr virus and B cell lymphomagenesis. JMS lecture theatre.

Book sale brings in the cash

The Library book sale in October 2004 raised £3,500, which will be used to purchase new books. Remaining stock has been donated to the University Women’s Society and externally to academic institutions in Iraq and to the Gaza library project. The Library intends to hold a sale at the beginning of each academic year to dispose of unwanted stock and make space for newer titles.

Postgraduate Open Day

The annual Postgraduate Open Day next week (Wednesday 12 January) provides an ideal opportunity for potential students to meet academic staff and current students. There will also be a series of workshops exploring funding sources, postgraduate loans and employment opportunities. Additional features include a display of recently published work by Sussex faculty. The Open Day is free to attend and there is no need to book. It takes place in the Bramber House conference centre between 12 noon and 2pm.

Man in court over 1898 rapes

A man charged with a rape at Sussex in 1899 is due before Maidstone Crown Court on 21 February. Paul Collings is expected to plead not guilty to raping a 21-year-old woman on the Sussex campus. He is also charged with one count of rape and two counts of indecent assault in the same year at the University of Kent at Canterbury.

News in brief

Tsunami Christmas present sale

Staff in the Sussex Institute are organising a campus-wide sale of unwanted Christmas presents to raise money for victims of the Asian tsunami. Paula Barnes, Admissions Co-ordinator in the Sussex Institute, says the organisers are looking for donations of "new or fairly new presents, CDs or books etc., or used items which could still be of value to someone else". You can bring your items to special collection points dotted around campus: check the Sussex website for details. To see if you can pick up an unwanted bargain, come along to the sale on Friday 21 January from 12noon – 4.30pm in the newly refurbished Essex House café bar. Proceeds will go to the Disasters Emergency Committee and local Sri Lankan charity Sarvodaya.org. Maria is also looking for volunteers to help with the sale.

Email m.barnes@sussex.ac.uk or call ext. 7587.