Recruitment starts to invest in excellence

Work to take forward the Investing in Excellence plans has been moving at speed since Senate and Council approved the proposals in late March.

The first phase of recruitment to 20 key academic posts across the Schools of Science and Technology, Humanities, and Social Sciences and Cultural Studies (SocCul) as well as the Sussex Institute is now underway, with full-page adverts appearing today (7 April) in the THES and next week (11 April) in the Guardian.

An early retirement/voluntary severance scheme was published this week (7 April) to support the academic development plans. Details of the scheme have been sent to all teaching faculty and the scheme published on the Human Resources web pages, with links from www.sussex.ac.uk/invest. The closing date for the scheme is 30 June.

Where outline academic plans have been approved by Council, a detailed planning process will now be taken forward with Deans and schools, supported by central teams led by the Registrar & Secretary, Dr Philip Harvey.

The Strategy and Resources Committee, Senate and Council will meet consecutively in the first half of May to consider papers on the next steps on the Investing in Excellence programme. The aim is that they should include outline academic development plans for SocCul and SPRU, the proposals from the Life Sciences review, and resulting decisions on the rest of the first-phase posts. Further meetings will take place as normal towards the end of the summer term.

Decisions on the second phase of posts will then be made in the late summer, so that recruitment can start as soon as possible after that.

A review process for the professional services (i.e. the non-academic units) will be taken forward in the autumn, to align with and support the detailed academic plans.

The posts include professors for both Engineering & Design and Informatics and three posts in Mathematics, which has built up a strong base in applied maths.

The closing date for applications is 27 April and interviews are expected during the second part of May. Full details of all posts are online at www.sussex.ac.uk/jobs.

Adverts for the remaining 20 first-phase academic posts will be placed as soon as possible after Council meets in May, in light of the outcomes of the review of Life Sciences. Council approved terms of reference for the review on 24 March.

A further 35 posts will be available in areas of strength and excellence, with recruitment starting from the late summer.

As approved by Senate and Council, this investment depends on making savings in each school, equivalent to around 45 posts across the University as a whole. As far as possible these changes will be on a voluntary basis.
Sussex physicists celebrate first findings of major neutrino experiment

Physicists at Sussex are celebrating the first findings of a major international experiment to understand one of the mysteries of the universe.

Dr Lisa Falk Harris and Dr Philip Harris are among the scientists taking part in the Main Injector Neutrino Oscillation Search (MINOS), which is designed to study ghostly sub-atomic particles called neutrinos. Neutrinos are able to traverse the entire Earth without interacting with matter, but the experiment has provided confirmation that neutrinos do, in fact, have mass.

Now the work will focus on how three different types of neutrino are able to transform one into another.

The Sussex team were responsible for designing a system to measure energy emitted by colliding neutrinos for a specialised 5,400 ton underground detector. The experiment involved beaming neutrinos straight through the earth from Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab) in Chicago to the detector 450 miles away in Minnesota. It took the scientists 11 years to develop the detector and the beam was switched on last year.

Lisa says the findings now shape the progress of further work. "Originally, neutrinos were thought to be mass-less, but we now know that that isn't the case."

"In addition, they exhibit the most extraordinary behaviour – due to a quirk of quantum mechanics, the fact that they have slightly different masses allows the three distinct types of neutrinos to transmute from one to another as they travel along. This so-called oscillation is the property that we're studying with unprecedented precision."

Neutrinos are vital to our understanding of the universe, yet scientists know very little about them. The abundance of neutrinos in the universe, produced by stars and nuclear processes, may explain how galaxies formed and why antimatter has disappeared.

Originally neutrinos were thought to have no mass, but previous experiments suggested that they can oscillate between the three types – a phenomenon which is possible only if they do have mass.

Lisa adds: "Our results will set the scope for further studies of neutrinos for years to come, ultimately helping us to understand the formation of the universe."

The MINOS experiment includes about 150 scientists, engineers, technical specialists and students from 32 institutions in six countries.

Top marks for training programmes

Staff in the Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TDU) are celebrating confirmation from the Higher Education Academy (HEA) that it has accredited two in-house training programmes designed to support Sussex academics in their teaching role.

The TDU runs the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (for new academic faculty) and the Sussex Associate Tutors Training Programme. The HEA has accredited both programmes for the maximum possible period of five years.

Sue Clayton, Development Officer in the TDU, said: "This is really good news for the support we give to teaching and learning at Sussex. Both programmes are seen as leading edge nationally and the HEA are using our submission to guide other universities and colleges seeking accreditation."

The HEA panel that visited Sussex met with a range of current and past participants in the two programmes. Here's what some of them said:

Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

"I totally changed my attitude towards teaching and started to look at the student's perspective."

"I now think about teaching with the same academic rigour as I do research."

Sussex Associate Tutors Training Programme

"The programme was very useful both theoretically (e.g. learning about higher education) and practically (e.g. designing lesson plans)."

"I have learned how to structure lessons and how to be more reflective and self-critical in everything I do."
LETTERS

Will Falmer stadium have a negative impact on the universities?

Reading the University's web page on the proposed stadium for Brighton and Hove Albion Football Club (www.sussex.ac.uk/falmerstadium), you could be forgiven for thinking that the proposal was all advantages ... will there really be no adverse effects to this facility for the universities?

At this stage it is difficult to tell if the licence for supporters to park on campus will make life intolerable for staff and students, but surely there must be some negative impact? If so, it is not being mentioned on Sussex's web page.

The effect of an equivalent to an eight-storey building over the road will not adversely affect Sussex, but can the same be said for the University of Brighton's Falmer campus? The main building for the stadium will be but 10 metres or so from its lecture rooms.

Students who object to this facility should complain directly to their course representative. If not, there is a grave danger that this development will go ahead without students from either university voicing their opinions.

Henry Page, postgraduate student, University of Brighton, Falmer

Chemists are not monsters

May I say how dismayed I am with the lack of support from Human Resources at a time when Chemistry is threatened with closure.

I had never met or seen before the person [Jane Suddermille, Director of Human Resources] they sent along with Alasdair [Smith, the Vice-Chancellor] when the announcement was first made [at a meeting for staff in Chemistry on 10 March] and there was no attempt by her to connect or empathise with our predicament.

We are not monsters ... honest!

Sussex, in my opinion, is still struggling with loyalty. We can offer you a few lessons over here in Chemistry if you like!

Mick Henry, Technician (Chemistry)

Residential scheme to expand

The University is seeking to create a partnership with landlords, the Students' Union and other interested parties to expand its 'head lease' scheme for students seeking properties for rent in Brighton.

Under the scheme, the University acts as the managing agent for property owners - making high-quality housing stock available to students. Residential Services are now promoting the scheme to owners across the city.

Director of Student Services, Charles Dudley, said: "Over time this scheme could potentially expand to provide hundreds of extra beds, with Residential Services acting as an agent in the best interests of students, without the University carrying the costs and risks of property ownership."

The University is also starting to release property that it owns in Brighton, with a further five houses (out of the remaining 45 bought in 1992-93) now being put up for sale through a local estate agent. This type of property could then be managed within the head lease scheme.

This is part of the long-term strategy approved by Senate and Council in 2004 to take the capital made out of small-scale local housing ownership during the 1990s and invest in facilities on campus.

New residential accommodation planned for campus will add 720 beds by September 2007. Work has already started on a site next to Falmer station to create 470 rooms and the building of 250 rooms adjacent to Bramber House is scheduled to start in June. Outline proposals for the North Field and the replacement of East Slope are also being developed.

There will be an opportunity to find out more about the plans for student housing at an open forum on Tuesday 25 April, from 12 noon to 2pm in Bramber House (level 1).

A walk on the wild side

Recently, Professor Richard Andrew asked us why the local Chaffinches were pecking the twigs of a Sycamore in the Science car park outside his office window.

Watching the birds showed that they were eating something tiny but numerous. A handy fire escape revealed that the twigs were smothered with little horny oval plates about 4 mm long. Some plates had been torn off, leaving a scar on the twigs.

These plates were the homes of adult female scale insects. These odd-looking bugs, with no legs or wings, lay their eggs under the plates or in waxy threads alongside. The eggs hatch into nymphs complete with legs. Different species over-winter as eggs, nymphs or fertilised adult females (adult males are a short-lived, usually winged, stage). Ours appear to do so as nymphs, and we have not identified them yet.

Scale insects feed on plant sap using threadlike mouthparts up to eight times their body length. Like aphids, they cannot absorb all their rich food and so their faeces are packed with sugar. This 'honeydew' is fed upon by sooty mildew, a fungus that makes unsightly black patches on the plant, and by animals ranging from ants to humans. It is the excrement of a scale insect feeding on tamarisk shrubs that is collected as 'manna' in the Middle East.

Scale insects also provided people with sources of red dye. The most famous were the Cochineal "Beetles" living on Prickly Pears in Central and South America, first brought to European attention by Hernán Cortés in 1523. For more than two millennia, however, scale insects living on Kerms Oaks, a native of the Mediterranean, had already fulfilled this role. Their ancient Greek name kokkos gave rise to the term 'cochineal', and the scientific name for a ladybird, Coccinella, meaning "little red one".

So it is fitting that our Sycamore is also home to two ladybird species, although neither of them are red. One is the Kidney-Spot Ladybird, which is small and black with a red spot on each wing case, and preys upon the scale insects. The other is the Orange Ladybird, which is larger and pale orange with eight white spots on each wing case, and feeds on the honeydew and the mildew growing on it.

This column started with a Sycamore, probably the commonest tree on campus and one of the most widespread in the country. Nevertheless, it is no native, hailing originally from the mountains of central Europe. Like many immigrant species its introduction has been popularly blamed on the Romans, but there is no evidence for this. It is first recorded as a garden plant in the 16th century but by 1679 John Evelyn was advising in the third edition of his Sylva that it "be banish'd from all curious Gardens and Avenues" on account of its unsightly honeydew!

Sycamore tree: Habitat to a host of odd insects, which make a tasty meal for the local Chaffinches.
Academic events

WED 12 APR

1pm Genome seminar: Paul Cohen (Cornell), Diverse functions of mismatch repair pathway in mammalian meiosis. GDSC Seminar Room.

WED 19 APR

1pm Genome seminar: Steve Bell (Hutchinson), DNA replication and chromosome dynamics in the third domain of life. GDSC Seminar Room.

WED 26 APR

12.30pm History seminar: Elizabeth Dore & Karen Leinboffer (Southampton), Memories of the Cuban Revolution. Library Meeting Room.

1pm IDS seminar: Stephen Sinding (International)

THU 27 APR

4pm History seminar: Al Thomson (Sussex), Illuminating postwar British-Australian migrant women's lives through the comparative study of letters and memories. Arts A1.55.

2.15pm SPRU seminar: Paul Davies & David Newton (Royal Agricultural College), Can increasing biotechnology adoption in food and agricultural systems make a significant contribution to the Millennium Development Goals?

5pm Tony Dummett memorial lecture: Julian Johnson (Oxford), Who needs classical music? Meeting House.

Small ads

For sale: Large Globetrotter navy expanding suitcase. 29" x 20" x 11" (74 cm x 51 cm x 28 cm). Cost £100, used once. £45.00. T 0881 11.48, E r.n.a.smith@sussex.ac.uk.

To let: Patio flat nr B'ton seafront. Suit professional couple or friends. £825 pcm for 6 mths, Apr-Sep 06. T 07789 956 966 or E sarahbh1@hotmail.com.

For sale: Nordica ski boots, brand new, size EU 5.5/US 6.5. £25. E s.goodwin@sussex.ac.uk.

To let: 1-bed unfurnished flat, Pwys Sq, £700 pcm. Available 15 April. T 07941 153096, E harfordthompson@gmail.com.

Wanted: Spare laptop with wireless connection, in good working order, for small-charitable organisation delivering aid to southern Sudan. T Dr C. Cabuk on 670574, E info@ilithom.org.

For sale: Guitar, Epiphone Les Paul, cherry sunburst. £150. T 07970 527200, E s.a.george@sussex.ac.uk.


Wanted: Studio flat or bedsit in B'ton. T Brendan on 07786 241212.

To let: Fully furnished 2-bed house in Hanover, May-Sep only. £715 pcm incl. cleaner. Suit visiting faculty or PG share. E L.mehra@ids.ac.uk, T 07890727663.

Wanted: 3-mth tenancy for couple (+ cat) in B'ton/Lewes with min. 1 bedroom, starting latest 24 Apr. Will consider house sharing or sitting. E elouise@hotmail.com.

To let: Single room on 5th floor of Kings Rd University accommodation. PG only. £78.25 p/w. E lds51@sussex.ac.uk.

Teaching and Learning Development Fund 2006

The Teaching and Learning Development Fund (TLDF) provides support for improvement and innovation in teaching, learning and assessment at the University. The next round of funding will be allocated in June and the deadline for submission of final proposals is Friday 19 May.

Proposals are welcome from both academic departments and units that provide academic support. Funding can be used to buy out the time of those involved in a project or to buy in support for development work.

Projects funded in 2005 included the development of e-learning tools to support large classes in Psychology, an evaluation of the use of peer assessment in Informatics; and the development of a cross-University careers-management course for level 2 students.

This year the committee will give priority to projects that are collaborative and effect change at a whole programme or department. Such proposals will be considered for 100% funding through TLDF. Proposals that are focused on an individual course will require 50% matched funding from their department.

To find out more about the TLDF, see www.sussex.ac.uk/tdf/tdf or contact Jannie Roed in the Teaching and Learning Development Unit on ext. 7761, email j.roed@sussex.ac.uk.

Unions reject UCEA pay offer

Trade unions representing staff in higher education have rejected a pay offer by university and college employers.

At a national meeting on 28 March, the Universities and Colleges Employers Association (UCEA) offered pay increases for higher education staff of 3% from August 2006 and another 3% in August 2007. The employers also agreed to consider the possibility of a slightly higher increase for the lowest paid staff in universities.

Negotiations continue on the offer and on how pay can be improved for those on the lowest grades.

Bulletin board

Details of all events can also be found on the web at www.sussex.ac.uk/events

Arts events

PERFORMANCE


Thu 27 Apr 8pm North Country (15). Gardner Arts Centre (GAC).

Fri 28 Apr 8pm Munich (15). GAC.

FILM

Thu 27 Apr 8pm Country (15). Gardner Arts Centre (GAC).

Wed 26 Apr 10am-6pm BA Media Practice and Theory degree show

EXHIBITION

Tue 25 Apr 4-6pm BA Media Practice and Theory degree show

Monday 24 Apr-26 April

Interactive media, photography and video by finalists. GAC.

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Bulletin

The Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and Claire Potter, with contributions from Jacqui Bealing, Maggie Ciune and Rob Read. 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 28 April, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 21 April. Please contact the Press & Communications Office in Sussex House, ext. 8888 or email bulletin@sussex.ac.uk. Happy Easter!