Sussex continues to ride high in university world rankings

Sussex has been named among the world’s top 100 universities for the third year running and scored among the top 20 places to study in the UK according to three separate annual league tables.

A new global poll by American magazine Newsweek this month placed Sussex 14th in the UK and among the top 100 in the world. For the third year running Sussex has been ranked 12th in the UK and among the top 150 in the world by the Institute of Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong. Earlier this year the University was ranked 20th in the UK and 100th in the world by the Times Higher Education Supplement.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Alasdair Smith says: "I am delighted that the high quality of teaching and research at Sussex continues to be recognised across the world, for the third year running, by objective, international studies. This confirms the basis of our strong international reputation, which is bolstered further by the recognition of Sussex’s achievements in a national study of British universities."

The Newsweek study is drawn up to reflect how universities are working to satisfy an increasingly international student body. The numbers of students from around the world, the courses available and how they prepare graduates for global careers are among the developments assessed by Newsweek’s Top 100 Global Universities.

Measures used to compile the list include the number of highly-cited researchers in various academic fields at each university, the percentage of international academics and international students and the number of articles published in leading publications. Harvard University is awarded the top spot in the international poll, with the University of Cambridge placed at number six as the highest ranking British institution.

According to the 2006 survey by the Institute of Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong, Sussex was ranked in the top 150 universities in the world and named among the top 60 in Europe and one of the top 12, where it shared its ranking with the universities of Glasgow, Liverpool and Leeds.

The 500 universities featured in the Jiao Tong poll were ranked according to the quality of education, the faculty and their research output. The University was awarded the same accolade in September 2005 and before that in 2004 by the Institute of Education after researchers examined more than 1,000 institutions worldwide.

Welcome to all new students

Sussex welcomes the 4,000 new students arriving on campus this weekend, who are about to discover just what makes this one of the country’s most popular places to study.

Highlights during Freshers’ Fortnight include:
- the Freshers’ Fair on Wednesday (27 September) at Falmer House, featuring dozens of clubs and societies
- the Big Chill Out on Thursday (28 September), with a farmers’ market on the Park Village grass between 11am and 4pm
- live music and DJs at the Freshers’ Ball on Friday (29 September)
- the fancy-dress Induction Dash around campus at 1pm on Friday 6 October
- fireworks outside the Gardner Arts Centre from 7.30pm on Friday 6 October.

For more information, see www.sussex.ac.uk/induction/ and www.freshers.usu.info.

Go for it!

Sally Gates was looking to meet students outside her Linguistics course and thought that the ‘University Challenge’ auditions might be a good place to start. Little did she know what would be in store ...

To her surprise, she was chosen for the next round and, soon after, the Sussex team was picked. Sally would join Andrew Reeves (Maths), Rosemary Rimmer-Clay (Social Work) and Matt Williams (BSMS) on the famous ‘University Challenge’ set.

Several months and a non-television competition round later, the team was ready to brave Jeremy Paxman. For Sally, the filming experience was tense and passed in somewhat of a blur. She says, “I didn’t even notice the time while it was being filmed. I was just in competition mode.”

A few myths were exploded: the contestants don’t sit on stages on top of one another; Jeremy Paxman is, if not a puffy-cat, a rather pleasant chap; and it is not a disembodied booming voice who announces the contenders when they buzz in, but a 20-something continuity announcer called Roger Tilling.

Sadly Sussex did not progress to the next round, losing out to Girton College, Cambridge by 190 points to 140 in the programme broadcast on Monday (18 September).

Even so, Sally truly enjoyed the experience, and recommends it to students who might consider appearing next year. “Go for it!” is her message.

She says: "It was a wonderful experience and totally surreal from start to finish. It was a great break from day-to-day student life whilst still exercising my mind in a different way to that required on my course. I also achieved my initial aim and made new friends; my fellow contestants are definitely on my Christmas card list."

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BOOKMARK

Barbara Einhorn (Professor of Gender Studies)
Citizenship in an Enlarging Europe: From dream to awakening
Palgrave Macmillan, £50.00 (hardback)
ISBN: 140399840X

Mary Evans, Professor of Women’s Studies, University of Kent at Canterbury says: "Barbara Einhorn has written an important and timely contribution to our understanding of the newly enlarged Europe. Most crucially, she argues for a recognition of the gendered complexities of the idea of citizenship. The book is essential reading for anyone who values the furtherance of equality between all Europeans."

Erik Millstone (Professor in Science and Technology Policy)
Health, Hazards and Public Debate: Lessons for risk communications from the BSE/CJD saga
World Health Organisation, US$45.00 (hardback)
ISBN: 9289010703

The publisher says: "The BSE saga has made painfully evident the limitations of risk communication where information to the public about the risks they face come after critical policy decisions have already been made. The book reports on research into the strategies used to communicate about BSE and CJD in four European countries between 1985 and 2000 in the regions of mass media, health information systems, and politics."

Brian Short (Professor of Geography)
The South East: England’s Heritage
Collins, £35.00 (hardback)
ISBN: 007155700

The publisher says: "This is the most detailed description of why the countryside of England now looks the way it does, covering the geology, archaeology and history of each area and what effects each has had on the landscape we see today. It includes: landscapes of power and control environment and the landscape cultural topography; regional patterns in an ancient landscape; the peopling of the South East and the evolution of settlement patterns; changing ways of life and the landscape; urban living; landscape and the creative imagination; and the theatre of the South East."

Dylan Trigg (Research student, Philosophy)
The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, nostalgia, and the absence of reason
Peter Lang, £44.90 (hardback)
ISBN: 140399840X

Sally Macarthur, Senior Lecturer in Musicology, University of Western Sydney says: "The Aesthetics of Decay challenges the common assumption that progress is rational. With analytical rigor and eloquence of argument, Dylan Trigg’s book takes the reader on a journey through metaphysics, psychoanalysis, aesthetics, ethics, theology and music to suggest the opposite: that the modern ruin redefines progress by embodying decline."

Life Sciences recruits new academics

Fourteen academic posts in the School of Life Sciences were advertised in the national press this month, as part of the implementation of the University’s programme for Investing in Excellence (IE). Appointments are being advertised in all departments in the School, including Psychology, Chemistry and Biochemistry, Biology and Environmental Science, and the Genome Centre. For details, see www.sussex.ac.uk/jobs.

The survey, which was ultimately deemed too shocking for publication, revealed that:

- One in five men said they’d had a homosexual experience;
- One in five women admitted to an extra-marital affair;
- One in four men admitted to having sex with prostitutes.

Dorothy Sheridan says: “People were much more judgemental about sex and sexuality in previous decades while today there is more freedom to debate these issues. There is a tendency to believe that sex was invented in the sixties, but in the thirties and forties there was a huge amount of experimentation and a loosening of social constraints.

“This lecture is about alerting people to the interesting things that can be found in archives, their value and the matters of life and death that they contain.”

East meets West with the expert advice of Sussex academic

A Sussex English lecturer has been working as co-curator on a major show charting 500 years of Christian and Muslim encounters and exchanges.

Dr Matthew Dimmock took inspiration from his own course in ‘Literature and Islam’ at Sussex after being invited to contribute to ‘East-West: Objects Between Cultures’ at the Tate Britain in London. The display, featuring British art from 1500 to the present day, sheds light on the relationship between Britain and the Muslim world.

It was his interest in early modern notions of Islam from the 1500s to the 18th century that first brought Matthew to the attention of the Tate Britain.

Sourcing work from public and private collections in London, Matthew travelled to the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Library and the British Museum to find pieces for the exhibition. He also looked to the texts in his teaching, including Arabian Nights, in an effort to show the longevity of British and Muslim relations.

Matthew says: "The idea of the show is to introduce objects that ask questions about the Muslim and Christian connection. The gallery wanted to organise something to coincide with Britain’s Festival of Muslim Cultures and the show is important because it is able to make connections between societies that are too often considered distinct.

“There has been a long-standing relationship between Britain and Muslim cultures and this display draws together objects you may initially imagine to be quite different and reveals how they are linked.”
VC'S VOICE

It has been a pleasure for me to start off the new academic year by welcoming a new team of pro-vic-chancellors to Sussex. Paul Layzell, Joanne Wright and Bob Allison have already started to make strong contributions to the work of the University. They are meeting as many colleagues as possible, and developing their priorities and plans. Each of them will be using the Bulletin in the coming weeks and months to set out their stall.

Alasdair Smith
Vice-Chancellor

The first task of the new Executive was to sit down and discuss our collective priorities for the year ahead and I'm presenting our proposals to the University Council for discussion today (Friday). It's a long and challenging and exciting list, and the very length is itself a challenge. If you have too many priorities, in reality you have no priorities.

Research planning and policy is high on the list. We are moving into the final stages of preparation for the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and Bob will be leading this effort. There is also important work to be done on looking beyond the RAE and ensuring we are strengthening our record in raising research council funds.

Paul will be leading on the development of our planning and resource-allocation processes, building on the principles agreed last year for Investing in Excellence. As Deputy Vice-Chancellor, he will bring together the different themes of the University's strategy — working closely with me; with the Registrar & Secretary, Phil Harvey, on ensuring that the University's professional services are aligned with our academic priorities; and with the Director of Finance, Allan Spencer, and Louise Nadal, our new Director of Planning, on the further development of the resource allocation model and of the business planning process for academic units.

There's also a huge agenda on teaching and learning and the student experience, on which Joanne will take the lead. We have made much progress in recent years in revitalising the curriculum and making Sussex more attractive to students, but there is much more still to be done. The results of the National Student Survey (NSS) reported last month were frankly disappointing for Sussex, and it's in the interests of both staff and students that we address the issues exposed by these results and do better in the future. I'm no great fan of newspaper league tables, but it is worth noting that our NSS been just average rather than below average, Sussex would have been eight places higher in the top 20 of the Sunday Times rankings.

It's also been a pleasure to meet the new Students' Union executive team and start to plan our joint work for the year. Of course, a good students' union will campaign and will challenge the university management, but co-operation on a joint agenda is also important. We made a start last year on working together to improve the Sussex student experience and we want to build on last year's work. As we welcome new students to Sussex over the next week, we all want to ensure that they have an enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

I should refer, finally, to the scale of the work being done on the necessary physical renewal of the University. This summer we have had to cope with the disruptions caused by the first stage of the major project to replace the campus heating system; and we can also see the early stage of two major new student housing projects, at Falmer station and beside Bramber House. These investments in the future are a clear signal of the strong long-term prospects of the University.

Work begins for new PVCs

After a few weeks in post, the University's three new pro-vic-chancellors seem delighted with the reception they've received at Sussex and pretty clear about their immediate priorities.

After a series of "fascinating meetings with all sorts of different people", Professor Bob Allison senses a "positive vibe about the place".

As Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Bob's first priority is to lead the development of a research strategy for Sussex. This will build on the University's existing research capacity and strength but will aim to improve the research culture and infrastructure.

The research strategy will also aim to ensure the best possible outcome in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). However, Bob cautions: "Sussex shouldn't be driven by the RAE. It's the research strategy that will deliver research excellence and an excellent result in the RAE."

Bob will be consulting on the research strategy this term, with the aim of seeking formal approval next term.

Consultation will be going on at the same time on a teaching and learning strategy for Sussex, led by Professor Joanne Wright, the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education).

Joanne says the strategy will build on the "fantastic things" she's already identified about Sussex as the "cosmopolitan and outward-looking" subject mix on campus; the "largely positive" recruitment situation; the high quality of Sussex entrants; and the areas of recognised excellence in teaching.

Among other things, the wide-ranging strategy will address the link between teaching and research, development of the curriculum (to make sure it is both coherent and innovative), and the "student experience". Joanne also hopes that it will encourage staff and the institution as a whole to be more responsive and reflective.

Bob and Joanne have been working closely on their emerging strategies with other senior managers including Professor Paul Layzell, the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Resources).

The three new pro-vic-chancellors have already been out and around campus individually and as a group and this will continue over the next few weeks as they get to know Sussex staff and students as well as the issues that face the University.

Positive welcome for new USSU–University liaison

Students' Union officers and senior managers signalled an important step in strengthening good relations on campus with the first meeting in 2006–07 of the new Executive Liaison Group.

This group — which brings together the sabbatical officers of the Students' Union (USSU) and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group (VCeg) — was set up as part of the response to last year's 'Sort Us Out' student campaign.

All sides acknowledged the good progress made in the last six months on issues raised in the campaign, such as academic support, systems of student representation, student housing, and facilities such as Mandela Hall. They identified a range of outstanding areas for priority action, including the Student Charter and work on equalities.

In the chair on Monday (18 September) was Professor Joanne Wright, the new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education). She said: "The meeting showed the good things that were happening and progress being made, as well as the areas where we need more work in the coming year. I was delighted that we all agree that the way forward is joint working on these issues."

Dan Glass, President of the USSU, said: "I feel inherently optimistic about the coming year. The three new pro-vic-chancellors have been exceptional at working tirelessly with the Students' Union. The University and Students' Union have been organizing and mobilizing to resolve issues of service provision, facility management and student representation."

Joanne outlined her immediate priorities as she takes forward her teaching and learning role — such as improving assessment arrangements, developing learning resources, raising the profile of personal development, and building stronger communication with the Union and student representatives.

Dan identified a number of emerging areas where he expected the Union to be pressing for action — such as diversity, local and international education, representation and environmental issues.
LETTERS

Thanks for the memories

I would like to thank everyone I worked with for the wonderful presents I received on my retirement on 1 September.

I really enjoyed my working life at the University. I found it interesting and not just my work, but life on campus and the many people I have met. In many ways I wish I could have had my life there as a student, given the opportunities.

Once again a big thank you for making my retirement special; the memories will stay with me for many years to come.