Step this way for innovation in teaching and learning

Two new 'creativity zones', designed to give students and tutors opportunities to unleash and explore their ideas in state-of-the-art surroundings, were officially opened at the Universities of Sussex and Brighton on 15 March.

InQbate, a joint project between the two universities, was set up with the help of a £4.1 million government grant in recognition of the universities' excellence in teaching and learning.

The grant was one of 74 made by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in 2005 to institutions to set up Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL).

Students are already benefiting through the award of 16 Creativity Development Fund projects, and now have access to the creativity zones, created in former offices and laboratories at both campuses. The zones feature the latest in screen technology, sound and lighting and are designed to be flexible to suit the needs of groups and individuals.

The zones are available for students across the disciplines – from engineering to creative writing. External groups are also welcome.

"The idea is towards a more generative experience where we use creative methods, the environment and technology to augment our innate creativity," says Peter Childs, InQbate director and Professor of Engineering Design at Sussex.

Sussex women to lead UCU

Women with strong Sussex connections have been elected to the two key posts of the newly formed University and Colleges Union (UCU).

Members of the UCU have elected Sussex graduate Sally Hunt as its first general secretary and former member of staff Linda Newman as its first president.

The union was formed in June last year following a merger between the Association of University Teachers (AUT) and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE). It represents lecturers, researchers and academic-related staff working in UK further and higher education and has a branch on the Sussex campus.

Sally Hunt will take up the post of general secretary on 1 June. She is currently joint general secretary, having been elected general secretary of the AUT in 2002. Prior to joining AUT she worked for two trade unions in the financial-services sector.

Ms Hunt studied International Relations at Sussex from 1983–87 and was also a vice-president of the Students' Union. For a year after graduating she worked in the Occupational Advisory Service (a forerunner to the Career Development and Employment Centre).

Linda Newman worked in the Sussex Library from 1977 to 2002 before spending three and a half years as the University's Transport Manager.

There was a third success for Sussex with the election of Jim Guild, head of the Scholarships and Bursaries Office, to the union's national Higher Education Committee.

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BOOKMARK

Melanie Green (Lecturer in Linguistics and English Language)
Focus in Hausa
Blackwell, £22.99 (paperback)
ISBN: 978140515162

This book investigates the morphosyntax, semantics and discourse properties of focus and wh-constructions in Hausa, and introduces readers to aspects of the syntax of a major world language unfamiliar to most linguists.

Kenneth Miles (BSMS), James D Eastwood, Matthias Konig (eds)
Multi-Detector Computed Tomography in Cerebrovascular Disease: CT Perfusion Imaging
Taylor & Francis, £65 (hardback)
ISBN: 9781842143155

Focusing on anatomy and procedural strategy for perfusion CT imaging in clinical neurology and cerebrovascular disease, this new text-atlas combines pictures and schematic diagrams to show how this new modality can be used to assess anatomy and guide therapeutic interventions.

The publisher says: "A comprehensive introduction to further clinical applications of a newly established technology, this highly illustrated text-atlas demonstrates utility of the technique and covers all relevant theory necessary for its implementation."

Brian Short (Professor of Geography), Charles Watkins and John Martin (eds)
The front line of freedom: British farming in the Second World War
British Agricultural History Society, £17.50 (paperback)
ISBN: 090326904X

The publisher says: "The Front Line of Freedom asks whether the war years saw a revolution in farming... This revelatory book challenges received wisdom about farming in wartime. It is essential reading for all interested in the evolution of 20th century farming and in the historical origins of farming's present predicament."

Nicholas Tredell
(associate Tutor, Media and Film)
Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby
Continuum, £10.99 (paperback), £50 (hardback)
ISBN: 0826490115 (paperback), 0826490107 (hardback)

The publisher says: "This is the ideal guide to the text, setting The Great Gatsby in its historical, intellectual and cultural contexts, offering analyses of its themes, style and structure, providing exemplary close readings, presenting an up-to-date account of its critical reception and examining its afterlife in literature, film and opera."

Conference marks new era for Mass Observation at 70

Leading names from the arts and academia will be taking part in a special conference at Sussex on 11 May to mark the 70th anniversary of the Mass Observation movement.

Journalists, historians, directors, producers and authors will be looking back on some remarkable work inspired by the Mass Observation Archive – housed in the Special Collections department at the Library – and looking towards a digital era that will open up the archive to historians and writers online.

The Mass Observation papers – a collection of diaries and written observations reflecting everyday life in Britain that began in the 1930s with the coronation of King George VI – have inspired numerous books, documentaries, films and television dramas as well as academic research.

Speakers at the day-long conference include historian Lord Asa Briggs, former Sussex Vice-Chancellor and Patron of the Archive.

In the afternoon, Sussex historian Professor Al Thomson will chair a discussion on the use of the Archive. Panelists include fellow Sussex historian Di Claire Langhamer.

Also taking part is Dorothy Sheridan, Head of Special Collections and Research Services, who says: "We are trying to be faithful to the original idea of Mass Observation which was to involve a very wide range of people. We want to have a celebration which appeals as much to those who have created the Archive as to those who use it for research."

'Celebrating 70 Years of Mass Observation: from the 1930s to the Digital Revolution' will be held at the conference centre in Bramber House. For further information and to register, see www.massobs.org.uk or call ext. 8157. The booking deadline is 13 April.

MPs visit new student residence

The Vice-Chancellor took the opportunity at one of his regular meetings with local MPs to brief them on the University's student housing developments.

David Lepper (MP for Brighton Pavilion), Des Turner (Brighton Kemptown) and Celia Barlow (Hove) are pictured left to right with Professor Alasdair Smith, in one of the kitchens at the new student residence that is being built next to Falmer station.

This is due for completion by September and consists of three cross-shaped blocks containing 472 bedrooms, each with en-suite bathroom facilities.

Another 250 students will live in a new residence being built opposite Bramber House.

These two developments will lift the proportion of rooms with en-suite facilities from 10% to nearly a third of the University's housing stock.

Visitors: L-R, David Lepper MP, Des Turner MP, Celia Barlow MP and Professor Alasdair Smith.

You can buy these books at the University Bookshop in Bramber House, or order online at www.sussexunibooks.co.uk. Staff get a 10% discount on all products in the Bookshop on production of valid ID.
The University received its annual grant letter from HEFCE (the Higher Education Funding Council for England) a couple of weeks ago. At first sight, there was no big news – the overall grant was more or less in line with expectations, taking account of additional funding for some science subjects.

However, a detailed study of the grant letter raises some serious questions about future research strategy.

There has been a national reallocation of £60m of research funding from mainstream QD (quality related) funding based on the results of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) to a new funding stream for business-related research. Because Sussex is significantly stronger in the RAE than in business-related research, this change has caused a significant reduction in our research income from HEFCE. Furthermore, reductions in research funding from charities and in the number of research students have reduced the formula funding of research.

These changes would have reduced our HEFCE research grant by £1m, and as a result we benefited from a one-year funding 'safety net' of £1m. By definition, however, a 'safety net' is a temporary expedient, put in place to allow us time to adjust to the underlying reality.

And that reality is not a one-year blip in our research statistics, or in research funding formulae – it is that we face a series of national policy changes in the funding of research, changes that will have big negative effects on the University unless we can change the direction of travel of some key measures of research performance.

This year’s changes in funding are a taste of more far-reaching prospective changes in the funding of research: full economic costing of research council funding, the increased emphasis on 'applied' research, and the allocation of funding council QD by formulae based on research metrics rather than on RAE scores.

There are a variety of ways of measuring comparative research performance: RAE scores, income from research councils, income from charities, business research income, and numbers of research students. The simple fact is that Sussex performs more strongly on the RAE criterion than on all of the rest, while national policy is moving funding away from an RAE basis towards the other criteria, and indeed putting increased emphasis on the criteria where we are comparatively weakest.

Of course we need to recognise basic realities and not beat ourselves up unnecessarily. Sussex is not a big traditional civic university with big applied sciences faculties, so we are never going to have the volume of applied and business-related research that such a university would have. And as our academic portfolio has evolved significantly in recent years, some large departments with high research earnings have become smaller, and the loss of research volume could not realistically be replaced immediately, for example by the development of the medical school’s research portfolio.

However, there is much that can be done, and must be done if the University is to remain a research-intensive institution with a broad academic portfolio. We need to achieve a very significant increase, indeed a challenging increase, in research funding from research councils, charities, and, where appropriate, from business. And for all that the long-term future of the RAE may be in question, the results of the 2008 RAE will condition research funding for the next decade. In the run-up to the submission later this year, achieving the best possible RAE result must be our top institutional priority.

The Selection Committee for the new vice-chancellor met on Thursday 15 March to look at long-listing the candidates who came forward from the search and advertising processes.

"A good list of strong potential candidates was identified," says Simon Fantham who chairs the Selection Committee.

The next step is for executive search firm Perrett Laver to meet all long-listed candidates individually and report back to the Selection Committee in early April for short-listing.

The Committee will also agree the sub-groups of students and staff who will meet the short-listed candidates, helping to ensure continued strong input from the Sussex community. The intention is that will be four such groups: one of students; two of academic staff (sciences and arts); and one of professional services staff from across campus.

The staff groups will include a good mix of staff playing different roles and responsibilities across the University. The student groups will include USSU sabbatical officers and other students. Their discussions with candidates will necessarily remain confidential between the groups and the Selection Committee.

Candidates will have a series of briefings with senior colleagues to help them better understand Sussex, as well as meeting the sub-groups, before the final interviews later in April.

The intention is then for a final recommendation to members of Senate and Council, who will meet on 27 April.

For background information, see www.sussex.ac.uk/vc/newvc

The Gardner building will be returned to the University in April after the final events in the artistic programme at the end of this month.

The Arts Centre’s board announced in December 2006 that the spring 2007 season would be its last.

The University, which owns the building, will give assistance to a number of external users as well as University schools and departments that already have bookings.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Layzell, chairs a group that is examining options for the future use of the Gardner building. This group has been consulting academic staff and students (through USSU) and reviewing the range of possibilities.

Paul said: "I am confident that this remarkable building will continue to play an important part in the life of the University, both in the short term and the long term."
Sussex yomp their way to victory

A team of business-savvy students from Sussex beat the competition to win the regional heat of Yomping the Nations last week.

The students – Thomas Barnard (Sussex Institute), Lisa Moss (SocCul), Charles de Lusignan (SocCul), Bryony Elias (SPRU) and Bonson Jim (SPRU) – took part in the game alongside teams from Southampton Solent and the University of Surrey.

"Yomp" lets students experience what it takes to start up their own business. The event, co-ordinated and hosted by the Regional Development Office, took place on 13 March in Mandela Hall.

Local business experts from Brighton came in to give their advice and assistance on the teams' ideas and strategies.

Sally Wright, Student Enterprise Events Coordinator, said: "All teams had a go and the team with the best pitch won – in this instance it was Sussex."

“It was a great opportunity to get Sussex students thinking more about the skills and recourses required to take a project from start to finish.

“There was a real mixture of students; we wanted to demonstrate that you don’t have to be a business student to learn how to be entrepreneurial."

“There was also great support from academics who came along to the day, curious to learn more about yomp and how it could be used in their schools for both staff and students.

The winners won £100 each and went on to compete at the national final of Yomping the Nations in Manchester on Monday (19 March)."

Kwiqq success for web business

Companies looking for a website tool similar to MySpace are being offered the solution by a past Sussex student who is based at the Sussex Innovation Centre on campus.

Raj Anand is using the skills he learnt on the BEng in Computer Systems Engineering and the MRes in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence in a brand-new web start-up business called kwiqq.com.

The company is being funded primarily by a Brighton-based business angel, David Hill, chairman of the E3 Group. The other investor is a professor of entrepreneurship at Cranfield University.

Kwiqq is already becoming popular and has contracts with popular brands such as First Choice and 20sities, building social networks for holidaymakers.

Raj describes how the company works: "We first meet the client to ensure Kwiqq is right for their needs and then we design and build a site to suit. We then host and maintain the site."

While still a student at Sussex, Raj started Kwiqq as a project to build a better MySpace for students and graduates.

He says: "I attended Cranfield University's 'Upstart' programme, where the main emphasis was to expand our horizons as tough entrepreneurs. While there I realised my software could be a useful marketing tool. "The project was voted as one of the top six projects to watch out for.

With the support of the Career Development and Employment Centre (CDEC) and Illums (University of Sussex enterprise group), Raj decided to make a business out of it.

"Most large organisations and corporations are trying to find ways to join the 'MySpace' revolution. As their web teams are tied up with their own traditional development work, it seemed an ideal opportunity to build a business around online social networking."

Kwiqq has a team of nine including three part-time staff. "As we grow we will need fresh talent," says Raj. "We recently had a recruiting session and placed adverts with CDEC. My personal aim is to get as many students/graduates as possible. Plus our market is fairly youth orientated so university students are a perfect match."

Raj is pleased with the company’s progress, but believes there is a long way to go. He says: "It feels great for the business to be doing well, but it wasn’t overnight. As with many technology businesses, surviving the initial development time was a struggle. But once the concept was proven, paths just opened up."

For more information, contact raj.anand@kwiqq.com or call 01273 704787.
Fundraising nose no limits

The Sussex campus was painted red last week as part of the Comic Relief effort.

Friday 16 March was Red Nose Day and, in order to raise money for the charity, a selection of events took place.

Kicking off proceedings a day early, staff member Nathan Catt made the decision to shave off his beard and have it crafted into a Fu Manchu style moustache.

For every pound raised through sponsorship, Nathan pledged he would keep his moustache for a further hour.

The official 'shaving off' took place in Chichester 1 and quite a few people came to watch the spectacle.

In total Nathan raised £417, which means he'll be sporting his moustache for at least 34 days, depending on whether the total increases.

He said: "I was originally aiming for £168 because that would mean a week of me having the moustache. That target was met very easily, so I've decided to aim for £500 and, if it reaches that total, I'll shave my head too!"

In Student Recruitment Services (SRS), Kevin Betts organised the team into holding a massive cake sale.

As well as that they spent the day trying not to say yes and no (not on the 'phone of course). For every 'yes' or 'no' uttered in the office, staff were fined 5p. The person who made the most mistakes had to perform a forfeit decided by the person with the fewest.

The SRS team raised £209.88.

Students from the Raising And Giving society (RAG) also held a bake sale, where they sold some very funky RAD pants – £1 for a pair of red pants, to be worn in whatever way fancied.

There was even a 'decorate your own' competition and all manner of designs were produced.

Within a couple of hours of the sale starting, the team had raised more than £200.

The campus Nursery went one step further and had a Red Nose Week. The children wore red all week, did red activities such as hand painting and, on Red Nose Day itself, painted their faces red and had a red nose hunt around the garden. All the toys put out on the day were also red.

Cake sale: The SRS team, L-R, Kevin Betts, Sara Candler, Lynda Whitty-Eastwood, Syne Hall, Chrissie Farley, John Sander and Daniella Salvage.

Going: Nathan Catt bids farewell to his beard.

Mouthful: Kevin Betts does his bit, by being sponsored to finish off the cakes left over at the end of the day – he raised an extra £20.

Finished article: The finished article, and Nathan will have to keep it for as long as he's sponsored.
Local pension scheme funding and review

The University is to provide extra financial support to its local pension scheme, the University of Sussex Pension and Assurance Scheme (USPAS), to meet the cost of benefits from its service, and will be involving staff in reviewing future pension provision, following the latest valuation of the scheme by the USPAS trustees.

USPAS is the local pension scheme that is available for clerical, manual, ancillary and technical staff at Sussex. It is separate from the national Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS), which covers academic and related staff.

The latest valuation of USPAS shows that the shortfall between the assets currently held by the scheme and the benefits for past service that are due to be paid in the future has grown significantly over the last three years.

This is largely due to factors outside the University’s control: life-expectancy rates higher than forecasts, pay rising faster than inflation, reduced growth in world stock markets, and the more prudent pension valuations recently required by law.

To ensure that the future payment of pension benefits for service already undertaken by USPAS members is secure, the University has agreed with the USPAS trustees to pay an additional £1.9m a year into the scheme over the coming 20 years, covering this shortfall. The University had already increased its employer contribution following the last valuation in 2003.

The Director of Finance, Allan Spencer, is keen to stress that this does not mean that the University’s income and expenditure accounts are now worse off by £1.9m a year.

“We have already taken full account of the shortfall of past pension liabilities in our annual accounts from 2005-06 onwards, so in accounting terms this new cash outflow does not create an additional loss on the University’s income and expenditure account. But it does mean that we will need to ensure we generate the additional cash through our normal business to meet these payments.”

The University will now be working, with the support of professional pension advisers, to review pension provision in relation to future years of service from 2008-09 onwards.

This review will involve relevant campus trades unions and staff who are USPAS members (or who are eligible to be members) and will look at a range of different options. Any proposed future pension provision would be subject to formal consultation: final decisions will be needed by spring 2008.

Jane Summerville, Director of Human Resources, says: “For the future, the University wants to ensure that there is secure and financially sustainable pension provision for our staff.”

While the review takes place over the coming year, the additional pension contributions required by the USPAS trustees to fund service under the current scheme for 2007-08 (which will stand at just over 24% of salary) will be met by the University in full.

During the period of review, the USPAS scheme will continue to be open for new employees who are eligible to join the scheme.

Initial discussions with campus trades unions take place next week, and meetings for relevant staff are being held in April to start this process of information and review. Detailed information is being sent to all current staff who are USPAS members and is also available at www.sussex.ac.uk/humanresources/uspas. If staff have questions they can email uspas@sussex.ac.uk.

Scholarship student takes on London Marathon

A Sussex student is running the London Marathon on 22 April to raise funds for his sponsoring charity, the Canon Collins Trust.

“There are many reasons I signed up to do the marathon,” says Jacob Dlamini, who left his family and job behind in South Africa to study on the MA in Social and Political Thought.

“I figured that training for it would help me avoid the fish and chips that are the staple diet around here; I thought having a reason to wake up early and go running in the cold every day would be the best way to come to terms with the UK’s crummy winter.

“But by far the most compelling reason was the history of support that the Canon Collins Trust has given to southern Africans.”

The trust has helped to educate many students from southern Africa since 1981, the year of the inaugural London Marathon. While most of those it funds are at university in South Africa, around 70 come to the UK each year.

First Class

Professor John Cheshire has been appointed to chair the Local Government Association’s new Independent Climate Change Commission. The Commission will look at the ways in which councils can tackle carbon emissions in their own buildings, facilities and services, how they go about purchasing green goods and services, and how they can encourage individuals, communities and businesses to reduce their emissions. John is an Honorary Professor at SPRU – Science and Technology Policy Research, where he led the energy policy programme for over a decade. He also chairs the Advisory Board of the Sussex Energy Group.

Fiona Courage, Special Collections Manager in the Library, has been elected to the national committee of the Group for Literary Archives and Manuscripts (GLAM), which champions access to literary collections in the UK.

Readers of Metro newspaper and www.asks.com have nominated the web blog by Dr Lynne Murphy, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics, in the Best of Brit Blog Awards 2007. Metro describes separatedbyacommonlanguage.blogspot.com as a “consistently fascinating blog by an American linguist, living in Britain, on the differences and similarities between how Brits and Americans communicate”.

Five members of faculty have been promoted to professorships: Marie Dembour (Law and Anthropology), Liz James (Art History), Daniel Osorio (Neuroscience), Al Thomson (Continuing Education and History) and Holger Wendland (Applied Mathematics).
A certain idea of Europe

The future of European enlargement was the subject of the 2007 University of Sussex Lecture, given on 14 March by Professor Alan Mayhew from the Sussex European Institute.

The lecture was held at One Birdcage Walk in Westminster and was attended by more than 150 guests, including VIPs, members of Council and Court, alumni and friends of the University.

Alan is an economist specialising in problems of economic transition and integration in central and eastern Europe as well as economic policy and budgetary issues in the European Union (EU). His lecture asked, ‘Can European integration survive eastern enlargement?’

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, the EU has more than doubled in size; two more countries are negotiating for accession and a further four in the western Balkans have been promised membership in the future. And that still leaves Ukraine and others in eastern Europe waiting to join.

For Alan, EU enlargement has been tremendously positive for two main reasons: economically, it has brought prosperity to Europe; but mainly, it has brought political stability to countries that would otherwise be rather volatile on the EU’s doorstep.

The lecture prompted a lively discussion in the question-and-answer session that followed. Alan was asked whether further integration (e.g. Turkey) would set a precedent for other countries (such as Syria) that do not share much common ground with the rest of the EU to seek admission. What constitutes Europe is open to interpretation, replied Alan; if we ignore other countries’ claims to join the EU we neglect them at our peril.

The University of Sussex Lecture is organised by the Development and Alumni Relations Office, as part of a programme of events to promote the excellence of Sussex research to a wider audience and to engage with alumni and friends of the University.

Corporate Events Manager Sue Hepburn said: ‘The event attracted a great deal of interest and was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended.’

LETTERS

Professorial lectures are an education

May I offer a few words of thanks for all the wonderful, fascinating and excellent professorial lectures I have had the honour to attend over many years.

I thank all of the lecturers sincerely for sharing their knowledge in such professional and polished performances. These events are simply stunning and a marvellous means of acquiring knowledge outside one’s normal discipline; the reason Sussex, my alma mater, is ranked so highly is self-evident!

I must thank Sue Hepburn (Corporate Events Manager) and her team for the fantastic job they do behind the scenes in making these events such a success.

This term alone I have enjoyed learning about buildings in Tudor and Jacobean England, the intricacies of the human ear, and the early human occupation of Britain.

One final thought: with the Vice-Chancellor’s departure imminent, what a revelation a ‘vice-chancellorial’ lecture could be. I would be fascinated to understand the trials and tribulations of being VC in a difficult and challenging period of change.

Keith Jago, Sussex graduate

How the University has improved

When I first arrived at Sussex in October 2001, I was quite delighted with the facilities but there were things that needed changes at that time.

Since 2001, the University has made some really good progress. These changes include:

- better study and research facilities
- better students from different places around the world
- online registration and Sussex Direct for online study material
- better Library facilities, with self-borrowing and self-return of books
- more professional and more co-operative staff
- the introduction of the Medical School and InQbate
- new student residences from the next academic year.

A lot of changes still need to take place and will happen. Alumni staff should work with former students to come up with suggestions and new opportunities for the University to succeed.

The future is brilliant for the University in spite of all the difficulties it faces every day. United we stand … divided we fall.

Mohamed Suhail Sayed,
visiting research fellow and Sussex graduate
Linguistics to join English

Academic faculty and students of the Department of Linguistics and English Language will transfer to the English department from the academic year 2007-08. Senate and Council approved the recommendation from the Dean of Humanities at their meetings this month. The decision follows a formal review this term by a panel from the School of Humanities and reflects the school's strategy to invest in areas consistent with its academic plan.

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)

Sussex is participating in a Higher Education Academy survey of postgraduate research students. The survey will be available online until 18 May at www.sussex.ac.uk/sussex/pres. The aim is to identify, at both a local and national level, areas for potential improvements. The Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TLDU) is administering the survey under the auspices of Sussex Postgraduate Skills Programmes (SP2). Contact sp2@sussex.ac.uk for further details.

Money talk

The European Union budget commissioner was on campus last Friday (16 March) to give a lecture on the future of the EU budget. Dr Dalia Grybauskaite, from Lithuania, was speaking to delegates at a conference organised by the Sussex European Institute (SEI).

Refugee archives: theory and practice

An online database of refugee archives will be launched during an international conference next month at the Centre for German-Jewish Studies. For further information, see www.sussex.ac.uk/units/cgs/barc.

Summer term sport

The summer term programme of sports classes and courses is now available: see www.sussexsport.com. Sign up before 22 April and get £2 off each course you book.

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