New Vice-Chancellor sets out change agenda for Sussex
VC’s vision

Asa Briggs, in his essay in *The Sussex Opportunity*, the book that celebrated the first 25 years, said: “We felt a sense of privilege in being allowed to build a new university”. I feel that same sense of privilege in being invited to take Sussex forward into the next phase of its development. On the day in April this year when I was offered the post of Vice-Chancellor, I accepted without hesitation and am delighted to have now finally taken up the challenge.

Over the last few months I have read widely about the University, talked to staff (past and present) and met some of our students (past and present). I wanted to try and get to the very heart of our university. These explorations provided me with an invaluable insight into the creative thinking that launched the University and to the fundamental values that - then and now - underpin our approach to teaching and research.

So what are my first impressions? I suppose the first overriding impression is that Sussex should be proud of its achievements over the past four decades, but not satisfied. It is still relatively easy to identify many of the distinct founding principles, including the desire to innovate, to create bridges across the traditional disciplines - both in teaching and research - and to provide our students with an experience that promotes liberal thinking, a desire to constantly challenge and a commitment that they should leave Sussex with more questions than answers.

I have been impressed by the honesty and openness of the people that I have spoken to and their willingness to reflect on both the current strengths and weaknesses of the University. Many have identified significant future challenges for Sussex but generally expressed these views in a positive, ‘problem-solving’ way underpinned by fierce institutional loyalty. Most of the people that I have met recognize that change, probably a step change, is required and the majority have not been short of suggestions as to what needs to be done.

So what are the key issues that I think we need to tackle during this academic session? Firstly, I believe we have to seriously address the student experience at Sussex. This is the third year of the National Student Survey and the results for Sussex are again totally unacceptable. As a leading research and teaching university, we should be doing better for our students on all the elements that make up the academic experience. I am determined that together we can achieve this: the best departments at Sussex have shown that this is the case. We must take a closer look at our teaching resources, and in particular consider whether we should make a major investment in the learning environment to make it fit for the 21st century. Getting this right will ensure that Sussex continues to be at the top of the list for students coming from the UK, the EU and across the globe.

Secondly, we must continue to strive for research excellence across the University and be ready to invest in those areas in which we can be a global leader. We have some world-beating research groups at Sussex and I want to ensure that we have the financial resources to build on these strengths.

I want to go back to the founding principles of the early ‘60s and ensure that Sussex continues to be a ‘hot house’ for innovation in education, research and enterprise. I will support organisational structures that maximise the opportunity for interdisciplinary working across all aspects of our mission. I have looked at the ‘master plan’ for the further upgrading and redevelopment of our campus and, while supporting it wholeheartedly, will probably push for even more ambitious and timely developments to ensure that we will be able to offer an unsurpassable environment for all students and staff as rapidly as possible. I will support programmes that ensure that we have both a ‘green’ and a healthy campus.

Finally, I shall encourage a culture that makes the University more outward facing and more actively engaged with the outside world. We need to extend our academic partnerships and use these as one of the possible vehicles for growth. Modest growth will contribute to creating the financial headroom that we need to make major strategic investments for the future.

I have inherited an outstanding senior management team that has already started this change agenda. They will receive my full support. However, we cannot do this alone. I shall be looking for help from across the University to bring these visions into reality. I shall be visiting all departments in the coming months and look forward to hearing your suggestions as to how we should take the University forward and ensure that our national and international ranking truly reflects the qualities of a university that has the potential to be back up there with the very best.

Michael Farthing, Vice-Chancellor

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Ability groups harm children's education, say Sussex researchers

Education researchers at Sussex have found major flaws in the Prime Minister’s education policy, which aims to have ability groupings as the norm in key subjects.

Two new separate studies show that sorting school children into sets is neither an accurate way of assessing ability, nor is it beneficial to their learning.

Research by Jo Boaler, Marie Curie Professor of Education, revealed that children in mixed-ability mathematics classes outperformed those grouped by ability. She reviewed a new way of grouping children that also resulted in unusually good behaviour and high levels of respect and responsibility among the young people.

Another new study by Sussex researchers shows that children are being placed in ability groups according to social class, with pupils from middle-class backgrounds more likely to be assigned to higher sets, irrespective of their prior attainment.

The results of Jo’s study, which followed 700 teenagers in the USA over four years, were all the more remarkable because the mixed-ability group came from disadvantaged backgrounds and were initially less able at maths.

Jo, who has been invited to present her findings to Gordon Brown’s advisors, said: “In England we use more ability grouping than possibly any other country in the world. Children who are put into low sets quickly learn to view themselves as unsuccessful and develop anti-school values that lead into general anti-social behaviour.”

The study, which analysed the results of different methods of teaching maths in three American high schools, found that an approach that involved students not being divided into ability groups, but being given a shared responsibility for each other’s learning, led to a significant improvement in the achievements of high- and low-achieving students. In fact, the high-attaining students were the most advantaged by the mixed-ability grouping, because they had opportunities to learn work in greater depth.

The study was presented at the British Educational Research Association’s annual conference earlier this month and is to be published in the British Educational Research Journal.

In a separate study, Dr Mairead Dunne led a project that analysed grouping practices in schools and found that working-class pupils are more likely to be placed in lower sets, with pupils from middle-class backgrounds more likely to be assigned to higher sets, irrespective of their prior attainment.

“Schools said that prior attainment and perceived ability were the main criteria on which setting decisions were based,” said Mairead. “However, over half the pupils with low prior attainment in English ended up in middle or high sets. Setting decisions were therefore clearly not made on this basis alone. Teacher judgments and pupil behaviour influenced setting decisions but social class was more important.”

Mairead and her colleagues, who presented their findings to the British Educational Research Association’s annual conference, examined pupil-placement decisions in English and maths in 44 secondary schools and 124 primaries. Their analysis included information on pupils’ prior attainment, gender, ethnicity and home neighbourhood. The researchers also checked to see whether individual pupils were entitled to free school meals.

Boys and girls were equally likely to be placed in low sets. However, some ethnic groups, such as Bangladeshis, were slightly less likely to be put in higher sets.

“Effective teaching and learning for pupils in low attaining groups”, which was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, will be published on 27 September.

FIRST CLASS

SUSSEX GRADUATE DAVID STONE CLAIMED TWO GOLD MEDALS AT THE WORLD PARA-CYCLING CHAMPIONSHIPS IN FRANCE LAST MONTH, WHEN HE SUCCESSFULLY DEFENDED HIS TIME- TRIAL AND ROAD-RACE TITLES. WHILE STUDYING SOCIAL CARE AND SOCIAL WORK AT SUSSEX FROM 2003–07, DAVID BENEFITED FROM A UNIVERSITY SPORTS BURSARY TO ASSIST WITH HIS TRAINING.

PETER TOWNSEND, RESEARCH PROFESSOR OF EXPERIMENTAL PHYSICS, HAS RECEIVED AN AWARD FROM THE CONFERENCE SERIES RADIATION EFFECTS IN INSULATORS IN RECOGNITION OF “A DEDICATED LIFETIME TO SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH”.

Bookmark is a regular review of new books by Sussex authors.

You can buy these books at the University Bookshop in Bramber House, or order online at www.sussexunicbooks.co.uk. Staff get a 10% discount on all products in the Bookshop on production of valid ID.
Vice-Chancellor calls for Sussex action on NSS

The new Vice-Chancellor of Sussex, Professor Michael Farthing, has made clear that improving the student experience is a key priority in light of the latest National Student Survey (NSS) results.

While Sussex's 2007 results overall have shown slight improvements in all categories, many other universities in the UK have also done well and once again scored higher on most of the areas covered by the Survey.

Nearly 85% of undergraduate finalists at Sussex surveyed in the spring term 2007 rated their teaching as good or very good, but in other areas of students' academic experience Sussex continues to lag behind.

Professor Farthing said: "This is the third year of the Survey and the results for Sussex are consistent. As a leading research and teaching university, we should be doing better for our students on all the elements which make up the academic experience. I am determined that we will establish Sussex as a place where students can expect the very best academic experience: the highest scoring departments at Sussex have shown that this can be done."

Some Sussex departments are indeed leading the way, with results putting them up with the best in the UK: Art History, Biochemistry, Economics, Law, Mathematics and Politics all rank among the top scores for their subject.

The NSS results for 2007 were published on 12 September, reporting final-year undergraduate views on teaching; assessment and feedback; academic support; organisation and management; learning resources; personal development; and overall quality.

Action already in hand across the University includes a new teaching and learning strategy approved by Council in June 2007; structural improvements to support this as part of the Professional Services Review of student and academic services; and laying the groundwork for systematic evaluation of the student experience.

Alongside this work at University level, the Vice-Chancellor has called on all schools and departments to develop immediate action plans that can be put in to effect in the new academic year. The Students' Union have also agreed to work in partnership with the University to continue to address the student experience.

Professor Joanne Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), said: "These results reinforce the importance of the work we have done to lay the foundations for implementing the new teaching and learning strategy and the changes planned in the Professional Services Review."

"The slight improvements in the 2007 results are encouraging, but there is a long way to go. They also point to some specific areas requiring attention and I am determined that we should work collectively to address them."

Director of ITS to leave Sussex

Trevor Potten, Director of IT Services, will be leaving Sussex at the end of October to take up a post in higher education in the West Midlands.

Professor Paul Layzell, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, said: "Trevor has recently played a major role in the reshaping of IT Services as part of the Professional Services Review and, as those changes start to be implemented, he leaves the service in good shape to respond to the challenges of the future."

The Librarian, Debby Shortley, is also leaving Sussex in October; a working group has been formed to review the Library and IT Services and to identify the type of leadership required in the next stage of their development.

As it is likely that a new Director of IT Services will not be in place until early 2008, interim arrangements will be put in place to manage the operation.

The existing senior team in ITS will cover the Director's responsibilities, with Caroline House taking on the role of Acting Director.

In addition to her normal responsibilities, Tessa Rogowski will also provide oversight of the Business Information Systems team, pending appointment of two key posts in this area.

Retirements

Kristian Berggreen, manager of the University bookshop, is due to retire on 30 September after more than 37 years working in the bookshop.

John Smith & Son, which now owns the bookshop, has appointed a new manager, Lucy Wills, with effect from 1 October.

Kristian has agreed to stay on for a further six months, full time during October and then part time, to assist with the changeover and with special responsibility for reading lists, liaising with teaching faculty, and outside accounts.

Pam Lamminian, who has worked on the University switchboard for 19 years, is retiring on 5 October.

Stanmer Court set to welcome students

In his very first official task as Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing cut a ribbon to open Stanmer Court, the new student residence next to Falmer station.

By the end of September, 474 students will be living in the three cross-shaped blocks, which the Vice-Chancellor described as "a special addition to the University buildings" and "a major breakthrough in terms of facilities."

Stanmer Court consists of a number of self-contained flats, each housing between four and six students. Every flat has its own kitchen/dining/lounge area and all rooms have en-suite bathrooms. In addition, there are a number of single-person studio flats and accommodation for students with a physical disability.

Fellow staff member Su Balcombe said: "She is one of those hidden members of staff that everyone on the whole campus has spoken to countless times but no one ever sees."

"She is the voice of the University, because anyone who phones the main University number hears her asking them to either dial the extension or wait for the operator."

Pam's leaving do will be at the Meeting House on Friday 5 October between 12.30pm and 2pm.

Swanborough, the new accommodation opposite Bramber House, provides an additional 250 en-suite rooms in flats for six or seven students.

Together, these two developments lift the proportion of rooms with en-suite facilities from 10% to nearly a third of all University housing stock.
Academic events

**WED 26 SEP**

**12.30pm GDSC Seminar**
- **Seminar**: Andrew Martin (University College London), Post-genomic analysis of effects of mutations on protein structure. BSMS LT.
- **WED 3 OCT**

**12.30pm GDSC**
- **Seminar**: Eva Hoffmann (Sussex), Recent work at GDSC. GDSC Seminar Room.

**6pm Marie Jahoda Memorial Lecture**
- **Lecture**: Carlota Perez (Cambridge, Sussex, and Technological University of Tallinn, Estonia), Technological revolutions, paradigm shifts and social goals. BSMS LT. RSVP essential: ext 8066. E epmu-events@sussex.ac.uk

**FRI 5 OCT**

**2.15pm Freeman Centre Seminar**
- **Seminar**: Mike Hobday (Brighton & Sussex). Latecomer entrepreneurship: A policy perspective. Freeman Centre G24/25.

Small ads

**To let**: Single room in London Rd station. Any time between 1 Oct & 30 Mar. Off-road parking, broadband access, TV and fridge in room. Shared kitchen, bathroom. P E 8.00 p/w incl. 1 cat in house. E aw32@sussex.ac.uk or T 385168.

**To let**: Fully furnished Hanover house. Available 1 Oct for 1yr. Gas CH, large garden, shed. Suit couple + 1. E 114.04 pcm. E d.papai@sussex.ac.uk or T Pasha on ext 4845.

**Free**: Female cat, 1.5 yrs old, excellent with children, passive, sweet. Neutered, house-trained, vaccinated, micro-chipped. E s.sullivan@sussex.ac.uk, ext 3918.

**For sale**: Casio UK 60 full-size keyboard. As new. Key lighting system, song books. £50 ovno. T Kerry on 887347 or 07796078235.

Changes to bus services

A bus route to campus that was due to be dropped this month is being kept, but with some alterations.

Brighton & Hove Bus Company has announced a number of changes, including the continuation of the 86 route; the service will, however, exclude the Craven Vale area near Woodingdean.

As previously publicised, the 86 route will no longer run, but its route will be covered by an extended version of number 55, which currently covers Mile Oak and Hellingbury. It will now serve the University campus via Coledane.

Both the 55 and 84 services will operate during the early-morning and late-afternoon periods.

There will also be a number 25 bus to campus every five minutes during peak periods of the day, and a diversion of the N25 night bus to visit Valley Mills (a student residence for the University of Brighton).

For passengers from Lewes, the 28 and 28C will be diverted to serve the Brooks Lane and Church Lane areas.

For details of timetables, see www.buses.co.uk. The revised services begin on Sunday 23 September.

From the night of 23 September, buses that come on to campus will once again be able to serve the Bramber House and Park Village stops. For the last few months, while construction work has been going on next to Refectory Road, they have had to turn right at the north end of North-South Road.

Transport staff will continue to meet with the bus companies to consider how, working together, further benefits can be provided that fit with the University's plans for encouraging sustainable travel.

News in brief

**Sussex Induction Dash**

Staff and students are invited to take part in the time-honoured Induction Dash around campus on Wednesday 3 October. The event starts at 1pm outside Bramer House. Fancy dress is strongly encouraged, with plenty of prizes for the weird and the wonderful!

**Freshers firework finale**

All students and staff are welcome to see out the freshers' experience with a bang and a banger on Friday 5 October, from 7.30pm at Falmer Bar.

**Library book sale**

The Library is holding a sale of withdrawn books. Education books and children's stories will be on sale on Wednesday 10 October; and politics, literature and philosophy will be on sale on Thursday 11 October. The books are extra copies that have been withdrawn following a detailed evaluation of usage figures. The sale takes place in the Library foyer.

**Special Collections refurbished**

The Special Collections reading rooms in the Library have undergone major refurbishment over the summer vacation. You can now browse and consult items such as the Illustrated London News, Picture Post or Local History collections among many others, in a new reference reading area. See www.sussex.ac.uk/library/specialcoll.

**Hotel competition**

"Four Acres" in Fulking is one of the hotels and guest houses with which the University has negotiated special rates: see www.sussex.ac.uk/about/hotels. To be in with the chance of winning a night's accommodation for two, name two of the property's 'green' credentials. See www.fouracres.org.uk. Email your entry to hotelcompetition@sussex.ac.uk; include your name, designation (staff/graduate), and contact details. The closing date is 31 October.

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