Christmas Lectures get rave reviews

Ecologist Professor Sue Hartley has been getting rave reviews for her Royal Institution Christmas Lectures, which she delivered to an audience of young people at the RI's historic buildings in central London this month.

The five lectures deal with the epic 300-million-year war between plants and animals, and how that conflict has shaped us and the world we live in.

Science writer Ed Yong described the reaction of the junior audience to the first lecture on his blog, ‘Not Exactly Rocket Science’: ‘So well-judged is Hartley’s talk that they lap up every word with rapt attention. When she asks for volunteers, the kids go mental ... The talk was beautifully delivered, wonderfully interactive and incredibly informative.’

And fellow blogger Susanna Scott (aka ‘A Modern Mother’) seemed equally impressed: ‘Wow, I can tell the Royal Institution’s Christmas Lectures made a lasting impression on my nearly eight-year-old daughter ... My daughter’s exact words after seeing the engaging Professor Hartley were “It was way better than I thought it was going to be” and when explaining it to her four-year-old sister: “You don’t know how fun it was.”

The lectures are demonstration-packed, fun-filled events that bring to life a fascinating area of scientific knowledge. Sue is only the fourth woman to present the lectures since they began in 1825 and is following in the footsteps of eminent scientists such as David Attenborough and Richard Dawkins.

She says: “Doing the lectures is lot of fun. It’s great to see the kids so excited by cutting-edge science.”

The Director of the Royal Institution, Baroness Susan Greenfield, was the first woman to give the lectures. She says: “I am happy that we have such a charismatic and engaging lecturer delivering on a topic of immediate interest to so many people.”

Sue is a world-leading authority on how plants and herbivores interact. She has served as vice-president of the British Ecological Society (2004–07) and has advised the government and European Union on environmental issues.

She has also worked extensively with schools and young people in promoting the public understanding of science, and was one of four University of Sussex lecturers who took part in an Art of Science event for this year’s Adur Arts Festival in June.

The Christmas Lectures will be broadcast over five days from 21 to 25 December, at 7 pm on More 4.

Positive signs from early UG applications

Undergraduate home and EU applications to the University of Sussex are up 35% compared with this time last year, the first snapshot of UCAS applications shows.

Professor Joanna Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), said: “This is a very welcome picture for Sussex – showing the effects of attention to the student experience, the consequent increases in our National Student Survey results, combined with the development of new programmes.

“It is important that we continue to work to attract students, as we are not yet halfway through the application cycle. But these early data are a very encouraging move in the right direction.”

By 28 November, nearly 6,700 applications had been received at Sussex, compared to just under 5,000 at the same point last year.

There have been significant increases in applications in a range of programmes across all schools – with applications in a number of subjects in the arts, social sciences and sciences up by over 50% or more. Nationally applications are up 10%, potentially as students make earlier applications.

The increases at Sussex come after two years in which the University saw improved conversion rates, but from a reduced application pool.

The Head of the Admissions Office, Rob Evans, said: “If this early trend continues it would return Sussex close to the strengthened position it had achieved by 2007, after two recent years in which applications had dipped.

“It is important that we can then build on that to grow the application base in a sustained way for future years.”

An increase in applications would not mean a greater intake of numbers of home or EU students, as total undergraduate numbers are currently capped by government – with Sussex taking in around 2,600 each year.

But it should mean an improved quality of intake, strengthening the wider student experience and improving retention rates.

First data on international and postgraduate applications, where significant growth is being targeted by Sussex, come later in the application cycle.

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Psychologists advise ‘softly softly’ approach to protests

Energy experts test climate of opinion at Copenhagen

Police forces dealing with public protests need to change their crowd control tactics if they are to avoid the violent confrontations witnessed at the G20 summit in London earlier this year, says a new report by a University of Sussex psychologist.

As the Copenhagen climate change summit got under way last week, police around Europe were preparing their response to mass demonstrations, protests and possible violence.

But they shouldn’t rely on old methods, according to Sussex psychologist Dr John Drury (right) and his fellow researchers.

Leading crowd behaviour experts Dr Drury, Dr Clifford Stott (Liverpool) and Professor Steve Reicher (St Andrews) were consulted by the HMIC (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary) review into the death of Ian Tomlinson at the G20 protests in London.

Now the HMIC’s report, ‘Adapting to protest: Nurturing the British model of policing’, reasserts the principles of the traditional British model of approachable, accountable policing based on minimum force for major public-order events.

The researchers’ ‘new psychology of crowds’ formed the basis for the recommendations of the report. They emphasise that most crowd members have peaceful intentions and would normally shun advocates of violence. However, this can change if people feel they are being mistreated by the police.

Effective policing therefore needs to be based on a ‘dialogue’ approach. This approach has three core elements: an understanding of the aims and intentions of crowd members; a focus on helping crowd achieve legitimate aims; and a series of graded interventions which target those causing disorder without denying the rights of the majority.

These ideas have already transformed policing in several European countries through the team’s consultancy, led by Dr Stott. The researchers conclude that, if implemented in the UK, they would be equally effective in minimising crowd violence here.

John Drury commented, “Our recommendations form part of a new agenda for the mass democratisation of crowd management. We have designed interventions based on our approach and have shown that they work.”

Sussex energy experts were in Copenhagen this week as the world’s leaders tried to reach a global agreement on how to handle climate change.

Members of the Sussex Energy Group (SEG) joined thousands of delegates from 192 countries at the 15th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15), which convened in Denmark from 7 December. Part of the University’s science policy research unit SPRU, SEG have been putting the case for an energy policy based on analysis of the technologies involved and which includes the needs of the developing world.

SEG have spent years researching economically efficient ways of achieving the transition to a new energy economy. Dr Jim Watson, Director of SEG, as well as Thomas Reilly, Rob Byrne and Dr David Ockwell, attended the final week of the summit, arriving on 13 December.

Speaking before leaving for Copenhagen, Dr Watson emphasised the importance of the talks. He said: “The more we do to mitigate emissions and strengthen the global capacity to adapt, the better. If we give up, there is much greater risk that climate change will accelerate and the costs will be for higher (and perhaps too high) than if we act now.”

“My personal view is that the deal on financing and assistance to developing countries is the number one outcome I’d like to see. This includes an agreement on how much money, where it will come from and how it will be distributed.”

Over a decade ago the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) began looking at how to reduce global warming and global temperature rises. In 1997 the Kyoto Protocol set targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, agreed by a number of nations. The aim of the summit in Copenhagen has been to reach a new global agreement under the Convention with effect from 2012, when the Kyoto Protocol expires.

Yesterday (17 December) Dr Watson and Dr Ockwell hosted a presentation of study on behalf of the UK and India governments – ‘Barriers to technology transfer in India’ – in the EU Pavilion. To showcase their proposals for a post-2012 deal on technology transfer between rich and poor nations. Dr Watson said: “We have been working on this with the UK Government for the past few years and our proposal has been supported by Lord Stern [the economist and Government advisor Nicholas Stern, responsible for the UK Government-commissioned Stern Report on the Economics Climate Change, 2006].”

SEG will be holding an international conference to discuss and debate emerging research agendas in energy social science, on campus from 25-26 February 2010.

The conference will showcase the group’s main research findings and conclusions from five years of core funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

See www.sussex.ac.uk/sussexenergygroup for more information.
LETTERS

National developments confirm need for change

Since we published our proposal on 24 November we have seen developments nationally and locally that reinforce the direction of change we have set out.

Michael Farthing
Vice-Chancellor

Our proposal is already set in the context of continuing to invest in growth in student and research income, while achieving targeted reductions in spending.

Since we made our proposal, we have seen the positive news that the first data on undergraduate applications show an increase for Sussex of 35%. This will not immediately alter the income to the University, as the total undergraduate numbers we take in are capped by the government.

But it is vital for strengthening the quality of our student intake and for placing us in a stronger recruitment position for the future. And, if this kind of growth is replicated across international students, where we have seen a 45% increase over the last three years, this augurs well for our ambitious growth targets.

Our proposal is already set in the context of increasing student numbers so, while this increase does not alter the context, it is a welcome signal that strategic change already delivered at Sussex is beginning to bear fruit.

However, we have also seen further announcements from government that directly affect both the costs of and the funding for higher education. The increase in National Insurance costs from 2011 increases costs for Sussex by more than £300,000.

And, more significantly, the proposed reduction in higher education funding by £600m in future years could take millions away from Sussex, as from every other university.

I believe that these serve to underline why it is absolutely right for us to be proposing to take the action that we have set out. It does not make the changes any easier for colleagues. But, without action of this kind and scale, we would be in serious difficulty in responding to an ever harsher funding climate.

I also believe we need to continue to ensure that colleagues understand the proposal and the approaches to consultation and discussion that have been set up from the start and are continuing to operate.

For example, we have now had six formal consultation meetings with each of the three campus trades unions, and many individual meetings with affected staff.

As part of that we have been talking to the trade unions about the mechanisms that will help to support change for affected staff - such as redeployment processes and voluntary severance schemes. We aim that, as soon as possible in the new year, we can publish the details of those mechanisms while consultation on those continues.

We have been open to ideas on how mechanisms for scrutiny of the proposal can be developed. For example, we are now putting in place additional scrutiny of the academic plans by members of Senate, following the initial Senate discussion on the proposal in early December.

We have also had the first of our open meetings with student reps (on 10 December). And, as a result of that discussion, further such meetings were agreed as well as focus groups with students on specific aspects of the proposal.

Finally, there is of course already a significant amount of information available on the proposal at www.sussex.ac.uk/vc/proposal

In response to questions raised we continue to add up-to-date information to the site; for example, we added comprehensive financial information following the suggestion that this would be helpful for staff and students.

We will continue to keep that information updated as the process continues.

The way forward on childcare at Sussex

We are writing in response to the article 'External provider sought for Creche and Nursery' (Bulletin 4 December).

We, like many other parents who use this service, are incredibly happy with the quality of childcare provision and are alarmed that Sussex management are contemplating closure, either in its present form (by being privately outsourced) or outright (by being shut down altogether).

The article states that in recent months managers have worked with childcare staff and users to explore plans to reduce the subsidy and provide service improvements, but that an acceptable outcome had not been reached. This is not the case.

Parents were invited to one meeting in April, but the focus was on service improvements and the threat of closure was not raised; there was no follow-up communication until parents and staff found out about management plans for childcare facilities on 24 November.

Given the current circumstances, parents of children who use the facilities (with the co-operation of Charles Dudley) are now identifying effective cost-cutting measures to keep the Creche and Nursery open. These may include increasing capacity, utilising space differently, changing ratios, increasing fees, etc.

In the current climate parents and staff recognise the need to reduce the subsidy, but also feel that the wider benefits of having outstanding childcare facilities on campus need to be taken into account.

It is a major enabler of student parents to pursue their degrees; it also allows staff to return to work relatively early. Moreover, it is a major consideration for prospective or current parents, when choosing to accept a job or a place at a university and a major factor in the retention of staff and students.

Without it, the University's stated commitments both to gender equality and to attracting the best faculty and students look undermined.

These benefits to the university are not being included in the narrow financial analyses which management have previously put forward.

It is a shame that, as the Bulletin suggests, management are already talking to external providers. It would make sense for parents, staff and management to spend more time working together to look at ways to preserve the key strengths of the current facilities, while re-organising it such that it will be able to operate on a lower level of subsidy.

Frances Hunt, Lyndsay McLean Hillker, Lynne Murphy and Jarod Roll

Charles Dudley, Director of Residential, Sport and Trading Services, replies:

I am pleased to confirm that we do have a clear understanding on the way forward and on the need to address the major financial shortfall, which is a subsidy by the University of £350,000 a year.

I said in my email to parents on 24 November that we would work with them to consider "further price rises and other changes to cover the full economic cost". That work is under way.

As I also made clear, we are actively exploring a third-party option. This would enable us to continue to provide a high-quality childcare service on campus. Such an approach is not new in the higher education sector.

Given the financial imperatives and the importance that parents attach to the service, it would be entirely wrong to delay any of this, as we must examine properly the options open to us. I must stress that no decisions have been taken and going forward we are discussing matters with staff and parents and will do so up to the Council meeting in March.
Doctoral School formally launched

Professor Bob Allison, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), stressed that the University wants to recognise as well as enhance the contribution that doctoral researchers and research staff make at Sussex.

While researchers spend most of their time with colleagues in their immediate discipline, the Doctoral School aims to ensure there are opportunities for researchers from across the University to come together, socially and academically.

James Birkett, Head of the Doctoral School, said: “With nearly 1,000 doctoral researchers and around 200 research staff, the Doctoral School wants to be responsive to the different needs of all its researchers regardless of whether they are part- or full-time and irrespective of discipline.”

The evening provided an opportunity for those attending to give their input into how they wish the Doctoral School to develop. On arrival, everyone was given an audience-response handset that allowed them to vote on what they want the Doctoral School to do for them.

Views were sought, in particular, on the nature of what an institutional Doctoral School space for researchers might offer. Doctoral researchers were overwhelmingly in favour of having more opportunities to network and to meet each other.

Researchers and staff also had the opportunity to visit ten stalls that showcased the variety of resources, training and services open to researchers at Sussex, including InfoPlus and new courses run through the Doctoral School and the Staff Development Unit.

International office moves to Friston building

The International and Study Abroad Office (ISAO) has moved from the Mantell building to the Friston building – the new temporary building on the northern edge of the Science car park.

The office may not be fully operational until after the Christmas closure on January 4, 2010. Telephone numbers and email addresses remain the same.

Head of International Students’ Support, Saro Dyer, said: "We are looking forward to current students and staff visiting us in our new location, and to welcoming the new visiting and exchange students and international postgraduates who will be arriving at Sussex in January."

The Friston building will also be home to the School of Law, Politics and Sociology, pending the construction of the new academic building at the centre of campus, due to begin in mid-2010.

Student takes second short film prize

Politics student Michael Badillo Ayala has won the University of Sussex’s second short film prize.

The prize was established to find the best three-minute piece that reveals why the University topped a 2009 i-Graduate survey and was voted "best place to be” in England.

Michael, a first-year undergraduate, also received £500 and will have his work featured on the University’s homepage.

During the film Michael quizzes Promit Adnan, a third-year Sociology and Development Studies student.

Promit explains all the benefits of choosing a degree at Sussex and studying in Brighton.

“I like how there is a diversity of studies,” he says. Promit goes on to note how great the campus is: “It’s beautiful, it’s green, and it’s easy to walk around.”

Using his movie-making skills, Michael then reveals Promit’s love of Brighton, Brighton Pier and the United Kingdom.

By giving international students a voice, the University’s international liaison team is helping people new to the UK and Brighton better understand their surroundings.
Tiger Woods is driving force behind book’s comeback

The law of unexpected consequences came into play when Tiger Woods’ car prang made headlines round the world, boosting the sales of a University of Sussex scientist’s book, which was spotted in the footwell of the golfer’s crashed car.

The book, Get a Grip on New Physics, was photographed in the footwell of the golfer’s car after he was involved in a crash outside his American home.

The golfer’s choice of reading matter sparked interest in the book, which has now sold out in the USA, with second-hand copies fetching $75 each. It shot up the Amazon bestsellers table, from an obscure 396,224 to the rather impressive ranking of 2,268 and has now sparked media interest around the world.

Academic and writer Dr John Gribbin is a prolific author of accessible science books, science fiction and biographies, including: In Search of Schrödinger’s Cat, Time Travel for Beginners and In Search of Superstrings, Symmetry, Membranes and the Theory of Everything.

His current book, In Search of the Multiverse, confronts the idea that our Universe may be one among many diverse universes and guides the reader through complex ideas that have transmigrated from science fiction into modern physics.

John says: “The book is aimed at non-scientists interested in ‘big physics’ stories like the Large Hadron Collider, string theory, black holes. But it’s ten years old now and hard to get hold of.

“Tiger Woods is certainly one of the target audience. He is an ‘intelligent layman’ who has time to dip in to a book like this on the plane between engagements. At a guess, he’s been following stories about the Large Hadron Collider and wanted to know more about big physics.”

It remains to be seen whether the book will inspire Tiger Woods to pursue a career in physics or space science, but John is certainly noticing a general rise in interest in physics. He says: “Several of my books have shown a slight rise in sales this year. I’m pretty sure it’s because of all the publicity for the Large Hadron Collider, making people more aware of physics.”

Lecturer joins debate on Shakespeare’s ‘life’ at Globe

He is celebrated as one of the greatest writers that ever lived, but the question “who was Shakespeare?” continues to fascinate leading scholars such as Sussex Professor of English Brian Cummings.

To mark this most tantalising of literary conundrums, and the 300th anniversary of the first ‘biography’ of Shakespeare by Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in London organised a one-day symposium of leading Shakespeare scholars on 28 November.

The symposium – ‘Shakespeare: From Rowe to Shapiro’ – saw discussions on the function and critical value of Shakespeare biographies.

Brian, currently analysing the Bard’s greatest works to find out how religion is represented in his fictional dramas, was one of the 11 scholars (including Stanley Wells and James Shapiro) invited to give a talk. His lecture, entitled ‘Anti-Biography’, highlighted the problems of trying to construct a biography of Shakespeare’s life through his work.

“Biography is the serpent in the garden of Shakespeareanism, a constant source of temptation and frustration.”

Brian says: “Biography is the serpent in the garden of Shakespeareanism, a constant source of temptation and frustration. The documentary records of his life are few and far between, and notoriously difficult to interpret.”

The event, organised by the Globe’s education department, was open to the general public and was well received, says Brian.

He says: “We discussed how easy it is to misconstrue Shakespeare’s works in the light of a supposed ‘auto-biographical’ context, especially in the sonnets, and whether biography tells us more about ourselves and what we are looking for in a writer rather than what the writer originally was like.

“The day showed there was plenty more to discuss, but that an answer to the central mystery ‘who was Shakespeare?’ is still as far off as ever.”
Memorial service

A memorial service and reception will be held on 7 January 2010 to honour Professor John Wyon Burrow, who died on 3 November, John taught Intellectual History at Sussex from 1969 to 1995, and remained a member of the Board of Advisers at the Sussex Centre for Intellectual History. The service and reception will take place at the Meeting House from 2.30pm.

Enrolments now open for Open Language courses

Enrolments are now open for Open Language courses starting in January with the Sussex Language Institute. British Sign Language, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian and Spanish are all on offer. Sussex staff and full-time students qualify for a reduced rate. For more information and to enrol online, see www.sussex.ac.uk/ languages/1-4-2-1-8.html, call ext 2575 or email opencourses@sussex.ac.uk

Gartner Research Reports

IT Services has subscribed to the Gartner Campus Agreement, so staff and students can search Gartner's website for their research and reports on information technology. To use the Sussex subscription to access the Gartner reports, go to www.sussex.ac.uk/its/gartner/ and click on the link and enter your normal ITS username and password.

Team up for Paxman challenge

Following an internal competition, a team of four (plus one reserve) has been put forward as Sussex's entry to compete for a place on 'University Challenge' 2010. Eighty students applied to be part of the team but the chosen students shone during three rounds of tough tests. Christian Drummond (second-year English undergraduate), Daniel Ward (second-year Medical Neuroscience undergraduate), Hannah Guinness (third-year English undergraduate), Hillary Easton (Critical Theory postgraduate) and reserve Alex Milone (first-year Human Sciences undergraduate) are now waiting to hear if their application to appear on the BBC TV quiz show, hosted by Jeremy Paxman, has been successful.

NSS start date confirmed

The National Student Survey (NSS) for 2010 will go live for Sussex students from Monday 1 February – with emails being sent that week to all undergraduate finalists by Ipsos MORI directing them to complete the survey online.

The University is very keen to ensure that as many eligible students as possible complete the survey and hopes to exceed Sussex's participation rate of 75% in the 2008 NSS. This ensures that there is a clearly representative view of student experience at Sussex, and that as many subjects as possible can have a publishable result.

Continuing the work carried out by academic and Professional Services staff in promoting the most recent surveys to students, it has been agreed that schools and departments should again take the lead in encouraging participation.

This action will be supported by central teams in the form of general mass communication and publicity.

Sussex and Renmin University sign collaborative degree agreement

A delegation from Renmin University in Beijing visited Sussex last month to sign an agreement concerning undergraduate degree collaboration in Business, Management and Economics.

The visit followed discussions earlier in the year when the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, went to Renmin University.

Under the scheme students will study two years at Renmin and then progress into the second year of specified Bachelors degrees in Business and Economics at Sussex.

The first group of students will come to Sussex in 2012.

Sussex will be holding further discussions with Renmin about collaboration at postgraduate level during 2010.
Students who are not going away for the holiday period can celebrate Christmas Day (25 December) on campus again this year, with a festive event in the Meeting House.

For the third year running, the University's Methodist Chaplain, Revd Cynthia Park, and a team of helpers will be hosting a traditional lunch and celebrations.

The festivities start at 1pm and lunch will be followed by carol singing, party games and the Queen's Christmas message.

Sara Dyer, Head of International Students' Support, explained: "Many international students are unable to return home because of the high cost of flights at this time of the year, or because their passports are with the UK Border Agency while they await a visa extension, and campus can seem very quiet and isolated during the Christmas closure.

The Meeting House: A white Christmas on campus this year?

"I'm so grateful to Cynthia, and her team, for giving up their own Christmas Day to organise this fantastic event for our students and their families."

Funding is being provided by the University's Community Social Fund, the Students' Union, and the International and Study Abroad Office, so the event is free of charge to all participants, including partners and children.

Bookings should be made, before Wednesday (23 December), through Teresa Davis in the Meeting House (t.davis@sussex.ac.uk), including any dietary requirements and also the age and gender of any children who will be coming. Students are welcome to bring a dish traditional to their country.

A walk on the wild side ↓

It hasn't escaped our notice that a fully mature and unusually decorative tree has suddenly appeared in Fulton Court (Library Square).

On close inspection it became apparent that the specimen is a Norway Spruce, Picea abies and, although there are none growing on campus, we felt that its seasonal appearance justified a mention!

The Norway Spruce (right) is the commonest 'Christmas tree' in Britain and although not native has been grown in gardens since at least 995 AD, and 'escapes' were growing in the wild by 1927. It is widespread across northern Europe and Asia but didn't reach Britain after the last Ice Age although the pollen record shows that it was present in the last inter-glacial.

The custom of decorated conifers originated in northern Germany sometime in the 16th century and reached England with the Hanoverian succession. Their popularity increased following the appearance of an illustration in the Illustrated London News of December 1848 of the Royal Family around their tree at Windsor.

The original continental tree was not the Norway Spruce but the Silver Fir, Abies alba, from the mountains of central Europe.

Unlike the spruces, the firs do not lose their needles over the Christmas festival and thus have become more popular in recent years. The two can easily be told apart as the needles of the spruces leave small peg-like projections on the twigs when they fall whereas the leaf scars of the firs are smooth.

The native tree most associated with Christmas is Holly, which is evergreen without being a conifer. It shares with our other Christmas plants, Ivy and Mistletoe, the twin features of remaining green at a bleak time of year and bearing conspicuous berries (in the case of Holly, borne only by female trees).

All three plants have long been associated with midwinter festivals when their decoration of our homes reminds us of the more fecund times of summer.

Originally the displays seem to have been viewed as sanctuaries from the inclement winter weather for benevolent woodland spirits and as protection against evil spirits and witchcraft.

When Christianity appropriated the festivals, Holly berries were taken to symbolize Christ's blood and the spiny leaves His crown of thorns, thus allowing a symbol of His birth to prefigure the Passion. With knowing irony, Holly was further said to protect households from pagan influences.

We pass on three hints for cautious readers. First, although Holly berries sustain many birds through the winter, they can cause vomiting – and even death – in mammals. Second, it is reputed to be bad luck to bring evergreens indoors before Christmas Eve. Finally, all Holly decorations are traditionally burned by 2 February (the Celtic festival of Imbolc, and Christian Candlemas) except for a small 'good luck' spray that may be retained until next Christmas Eve.

We wish all our readers a peaceful midwinter.
WED 13 JAN
6pm Security seminar: Clare Short MP. Security sector reforms. Arts C133.

THU 14 JAN
6.30pm Medical lecture: Melanie Newport (Sussex), Developments in genetics and infections and what it means for global health. BSMS lecture theatre.

For clarity, as staff have asked about this in previous years, a day’s (or a half-day’s) annual leave taken on 23 December counts as a full-day’s (or half-day’s) leave as normal.

The University will re-open fully on Monday 4 January at the normal start time. The spring term begins on Monday 11 January.

On Wednesday (23 December), the normal working day will end at 3pm. This means that staff, other than those providing essential services, can expect to finish work at 3pm.

Any minimum cover or on-call arrangements required by particular units or sections will continue to operate.

A series of nine public lectures by Sussex academics, as well as eminent national and international speakers, will be held on campus during the spring 2010 term. Covering a wide range of contemporary issues in subjects such as medicine, economics and American history, all the lectures are free of charge and open to all.

The Sussex Lectures, which are put on throughout the year to highlight the University’s research expertise, will start again on 14 January with a Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) Inaugural Lecture called ‘Personalised medicine for everyone?’ Developments in genetics and infection and what it means for global health’. Presented by Professor Melanie Newport, this lecture will give an overview of how advances in the human genome project have influenced clinical practice in Western societies.

There will be four professorial lectures – from Andy McKay, Professor of Development Economics (39 January); Susan Milins, Professor of Law (2 March); Jo Boaler, Professor of Education (9 March); and Suzy Brayne, Professor of Social Work and Social Care (16 March).

Black struggles for power in the USA in the late 19th/early 20th century will be tackled by Professor Steven Hahn (Pennsylvania), winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for History, in the Marcus Cunliffe Centre for the Study of the American South Lecture on 15 February.

‘Country life in Roman Wessex’ is the subject of Professor Barry Cunliffe’s (Oxford) lecture on 17 February.

The Sussex Centre for Intellectual History lectures will see Professor J.G.A. Pocock (John Hopkins University, Baltimore) discuss the reception of Edward Gibbon’s chapters on the spread of Christianity in the 1776 publication of Decline and Fall (2 March); and, on 16 March, Dr Noel Malcolm (Oxford), will talk on ‘The religion of the Patriarchs: ideas about Judaism and ‘natural religion’ in early modern Europe’.

For details of each lecture, see the events diary – you are asked to RSVP as indicated for each lecture.

Podcasts of selected lectures will be available online a couple of weeks after the event and can be found at the Sussex Lectures archive.

The Sussex Lectures are co-ordinated by the Development and Alumni Relations Office as part of a programme of activities aimed to promote Sussex’s excellent research and teaching, and to provide opportunities for alumni and friends to celebrate and support this work.

The fortnightly Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and James Heiner. The next issue will be out on 15 January, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 8 January. We welcome any letters from staff and students of the University and can advise you on ways to tell people about your news or story ideas. Please contact us on ext. 8888 or email internalcomms@sussex.ac.uk. Season’s greetings!