Hoardings show vision for new teaching building

Hoardings are now up around the site of the new teaching building at the heart of campus, showing large-scale drawings and plans of what the 10-million-pound development will look like when it opens in summer 2010.

The boards – surrounding the boundary of the building site – show an artist’s impression of the state-of-the-art facility alongside architectural sketches of the innovative design.

Designed to the highest environmental standards, the new teaching building is a key development in the University’s new strategic plan, Making the Future. It is fitting then that it is to be named the Fulton Building, after the University’s first Vice-Chancellor Lord Fulton who in 1961 said that education at Sussex was “making the future”, inspiring the title of the plan.

His son Oliver Fulton, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at Lancaster, accepted the proposal on behalf of the family. He said: “I would be delighted to see my father's name given to the new building.

“It seems to me very appropriate given my father’s particular interest in the contribution Sussex made to ‘redesigning the map of learning’.”

Construction work on the new building, alongside Swanborough student residences, started in January and a ground-breaking ceremony took place in February led by Vice-Chancellor Professor Michael Farthing.

It is due to open during the academic year 2010–11 and will provide 3,000 square metres of teaching space across three floors, including two 180-seat lecture theatres and a mix of 22 different sized seminar rooms.

On the ground floor, the design incorporates a flexible social and meeting space that will complement the dedicated teaching spaces in the rest of the building.

Once completed, it will enable the removal of the short-life Russell Building on the west side of campus, which has provided a significant part of the University’s seminar space since 2003.

The design of the new teaching building with red brick and glass matches the Swanborough buildings and echoes the original designs by Sir Basil Spence for the core campus buildings, particularly the Pevensey building.

The building has also been designed to minimise impact on the environment, with concrete floors acting as heat sinks, and natural ventilation systems.

In line with the campus masterplan to ensure further development of the green spaces on campus, the site also includes the creation of a new grass courtyard at the eastern corner of Arts Road and Refectory Road.

A live photo feed from the site and a time-lapsed video of the work so far are available online at www.sussex.ac.uk/its/buildwatch/

Interviews take place for PVC International

Interviews for a new senior post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) to join the executive team have taken place this week.

The post was advertised in Times Higher Education in April, longlisting and shortlisting took place during May and June.

The selection panel, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, includes an independent member of Council, a member of Senate, one of the new heads of school and an experienced external individual.

Members of Senate (the University’s academic body) are being consulted about their views on the preferred candidate before a recommendation is made to Council for its approval.

The new role will provide senior academic leadership for the University’s internationalisation strategy. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) will develop the University’s worldwide partnerships and links and increase the number of international students at Sussex in a fast-changing and competitive market.

Like the other Pro-Vice-Chancellor posts, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) will also have direct line management for a number of the new heads of school.

The successful candidate will be a leading academic in their discipline, with considerable experience of delivering growth in international activity. The aim is for an appointment to start in the new academic year 2009–10.

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Caught on camera: the rainforest’s endangered animals

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Up close: A rare spectacled bear is caught on camera during a trial run of Dr Mika Peck’s project in 2008. A new link-up with Google Maps will allow the images to reach living rooms around the world.

Rarely seen and endangered mammals such as the spectacled bear and jungle big cats will soon be captured for the world to view — on camera, that is — thanks to an innovative project involving the University of Sussex and internet giants Google.

The animals under scrutiny live in the north-west Ecuadorian rainforest in South America — a diversity hotspot with more mammals than anywhere else on earth, but which is under threat from logging and the effects of climate change.

Dr Mika Peck has been working on conservation projects in the Santa Lucia Cloudforest Reserve for several years. He says: "There is an urgent need to assess the status of endangered species to see whether the current network of protected forests is successful in conserving biodiversity, particularly the larger mammal species that need particular types of habitat and larger areas to roam in."

To monitor these animals and to build a picture of the rainforest’s general health, Mika and his fellow conservationists are using motion-sensitive digital-camera traps that film endangered species in difficult-to-access habitats.

The information is sent via the internet, using a solar-powered laptop and a mobile broadband connection in the reserve lodge, to an online database managed by Computing and Electronic Services Manager Brian Wathurton in Life Sciences.

With help from Google Maps, the public will be able to view the images and keep track of species via the web site of charity Rainforest Concern at www.rainforestconcern.org/

Mika says: "The link to Google allows us to spy on this remote rainforest from the comfort of our homes. We might even get to see something completely unexpected. The images already collected in a trial run in 2008 inspired wonder and surprise even among locals, as these large mammals are rarely seen even by them in the dense forest."

Mika has been helping to create alternative sustainable livelihoods to hunting and logging, such as small-scale ecotourism. Through this latest project, tourists could soon be trekking into the jungle with local workers to collect memory cards from the camera traps, providing income from tourism and jobs for the local population.

Mika says: "We hope the project will run for at least 10 years and that it will start to pay for itself as people visit the reserve to help with the data collection as part of a 'scientific eco-holiday'."

He adds: "The long-term storage of this type of information means we can follow what happens to these species as we try to engage in their conservation."

Research Review launched at Royal Society

Sussex’s annual Research Review 2009 — Researching for the future — was launched at the Royal Society on 22 June as guests from government, the public sector and business mixed with leading Sussex researchers.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, in welcoming colleagues and guests, highlighted developments on the Sussex research strategy embodied in Making the Future, and in particular the six new research themes.

As well as providing an overview of research developments at Sussex, the Annual Research Review is now framed around those six themes, with examples given of research work in each theme.

Guests and academic colleagues at the event in London were grouped in tables based on the six themes — enabling the sharing of ideas and opportunities to develop collaboration into the future.

New films featuring Sussex were shown at the dinner to bring to life a number of the stories covered in the Research Review — from Professor Francis Ratnieks’ work with bees and Dr Claire Langhamer’s research in the Mass Observation archive to Dr Graham McAllister’s usability lab. The films are now online with the web version of the review at www.sussex.ac.uk/research/review2009/

Professor Alan Thorpe, Chief Executive of the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and shortly to be Chair of Research Councils UK, was the main speaker.

He gave an overview of latest developments in research council strategy and funding and the specifics of the work of the NERC.

He assured colleagues of the continued ring-fencing of research funding, but warned of tough financial times ahead, with tight public-sector spending.

Professor Thorpe praised the Sussex research strategy — both in its focus and in its creation of interdisciplinary research themes. This is a development being mirrored by the work by the research councils on their own cross-council research programmes, many of which match those being developed at Sussex.

He also welcomed the creation of the Doctoral School — with its focus on supporting the full spectrum of early-career researchers, from new DPhil students to established post-docs — as something that research councils are keen to support.

In concluding, Professor Bob Allison, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), thanked colleagues in Development and Alumni Relations, the Regional Development Office and the Publications team for their hard work in creating this major showcase event for Sussex research.

Hard copies of the Research Review are being made available to Council, Senate and all schools.
New approaches to supporting student attendance

From the start of the academic year 2009–10, the Student Support & Experience section will be working with the new schools on ways to support students who experience difficulty in getting to their classes.

Research across the higher education sector supports the view that there is a strong correlation between attendance and attainment, with a general understanding that, if a student does not attend at least 70% of teaching sessions, they have a two-in-three chance of failing and a four-in-five chance of not getting a first or 2:1.

There is also a clear relationship between patchy attendance and intermission or permanent withdrawal.

Over the next few weeks, staff from Student Support & Experience will be working with academic leaders to agree a University policy on attendance: what values Sussex holds in relation to attendance, and how to make those visible in communications with students.

"In developing policy, we'll be looking to draw on the excellent practice that already exists within different areas of the University," emphasises Jenni Grundy, Head of Student Support & Experience.

At the start of the next academic year, staff from Student Support & Experience will be talking to all Sussex students about the importance of attendance and encouraging individuals to let staff know if they experience difficulty getting to lectures or classes.

The new schools will be making sure they have accurate information about attendance, which they can use to support individual students and to inform the development of University policy – perhaps in relation to timetables, for example.

In addition, the new Student Advice Teams will be reviewing student attendance on a regular basis and contacting those students who are at risk of failing behind or who may need additional support to overcome personal barriers to learning.

"We'll keep the discussion going," says Jenni. "We will be seeking to improve our services on the basis of feedback from students and also academic colleagues."

Senate endorses approach to tackling budget deficits

Senate has endorsed an updated paper on setting a budget for 2009–10 and a revised budget paper will be presented to Council today (3 July).

As is the case across the higher education sector, the University is facing significant cost pressures with an additional £5m of costs for 2009–10, pushing the budget into significant deficit for 2009–10, and worsening in later years. The reported state of the national economy and future public finances continues to worsen.

On 26 June Senate discussed and endorsed the Strategy and Resources Committee (SRC) report, which recommended that, in now setting a budget for 2009–10, the University needs to continue to plan for growth and invest in capital development, while taking out costs from targeted areas.

In particular:
- it will be important to focus on areas of growth and to refetch from areas that do not offer the highest prospects of growth;
- development of proposals for changing the academic shape of a school should be led by the appropriate head of school in consultation with their academic leadership team and academic staff;
- proposals for change should be brought together so that they can be assessed by the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Group (VCEG) and SRC, especially in relation to the global impact on the University;
- proposals will be subject to appropriate and relevant consultation, including with trade unions;
- clear lines of communication need to be established by heads of school with students in each school; and
- equality-impact assessments should be conducted on emerging change proposals.

A working group with representatives from Senate is now being established to refine the detail of the academic ‘drivers’ for change, which will inform the development of future proposals.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, said: ‘The Senate and Council papers clearly set out the scale and dimension of the challenge we face and the principles and approach we propose to adopt in tackling this challenge.

"I am pleased that Senate have fully endorsed that approach and that, like my executive team, they believe we can and should work together to address these difficult circumstances."

The full Senate paper is available on Sussex Direct.

Next steps for teaching and learning

It was only two years ago that the first outline of a new teaching and learning strategy was developed at Sussex, drawing on discussions across the academy and with our students.

Professor Joanne Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education)

It is striking that some long-serving colleagues told me then that this was one of the first times that Sussex – although it had a rich and proud tradition of teaching innovation – had sought to create a comprehensive strategic approach to these matters.

This strategic development then informed the goals for teaching and learning and the student experience within ‘Making the Future’. Since 2007 we have already seen some significant steps forward in achieving our goals, for example:
- major curriculum development, with the creation of a suite of new business and management and international security programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels, which have already attracted significant numbers of applications;
- a significantly strengthened approach to enhancing the student experience, with a new Student Experience Forum, and a new Head of Student Support & Experience driving work forward;
- a major improvement in our results in the National Student Survey in 2008, after three years in which Sussex had been under-performing;
- the planning and approval of a major new teaching building, already under construction, fittingly now to be named after our first vice-chancellor, Lord Fulton;
- the creation of the Sussex Plus initiative, now entering its second large-scale pilot, to transform the way in which students can develop, record and reflect on their wider skills and experience at Sussex.

We were able to present to the Teaching and Learning Committee this term a detailed operational plan on the teaching and learning strategy – which builds on these developments and more.

The operational plan envisages new initiatives, such as steps to improve student engagement with learning; new approaches to inclusive teaching; and technology-enhanced learning.

Alongside this, we are taking forward discussions, such as reform of the term structure, and other opportunities, all of which aim for the continued and goal of enhancing the student and staff experience of teaching and learning at Sussex.

I believe that Sussex has shown it is willing to embrace change, and that the University will work collectively within this strategic approach. For me, as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), this has been a rewarding experience.

A telling example of this is in relation to employability. This is an increasingly important aspect of what our undergraduates are seeking to achieve when they undertake their education. It is not antithetical to the purpose of academic education, but something that enhances it and that we should be embracing. I am pleased that we are moving in this direction.

Finally, I should pay tribute to academic colleagues and Professional Services teams who are working together to make this all happen. I am looking forward to taking this agenda further as the new schools come into being and we work with new heads of school and their Directors of Taught Programmes.
Sussex Twitter tops 1,000 followers

Are you keeping in touch with developments at Sussex on Twitter? Over 1,000 people inside and outside the University now are, as this latest social media phenomenon takes off across the world.

The University of Sussex uses its Twitter account (twitter.com/SussexUni), first set up in February, to provide quick and frequent 140-character updates on life and news at the University.

On 24 June it passed the 1,000 mark for ‘followers’, i.e. Twitter users who have chosen to receive updates from Sussex.

The Director of Communications, Rob Read, says: “Twitter’s a quick and easy way of sharing latest news about Sussex with a wide community of people.

“And people pass on what we put out there. For example, there’s an avid wildlife community out there in Sussex, and when the bee movie went up (at www.sussex.ac.uk/research/review2009/environmentandhealth.php) that got passed round rapidly.”

And, like writing a good headline, the discipline of cutting text down to 140 characters forces ‘tweet’ers to think about what they are really trying to say.

Other parts of the University using Twitter include the Library, CDEC and alumni teams, all of whom update their feeds for their own ‘followers’. The University is looking at a quick tool that would make it possible in the future to bring these together in one place and see all the feeds going out from Sussex.

But Twitter’s not just a one-way channel for organisations; it also provides a great insight into what people are saying about Sussex.

Rob says: “Potential students were ‘tweeting’ their friends about the student open day in mid June – and making favourable comparisons with other universities.”

Within SPLASH (splash.sussex.ac.uk) it is possible to view any ‘tweets’ that mention the University.

The University is looking at how to develop a presence on other social media to support potential students. It’s not all Facebook and Twitter; computer users are accessing sites such as Orkut in Brazil and India, Rediff also in India, and Wkontakte in Russia. “We need to provide tools to staff to ensure that we can share information through these routes as well,” says Rob.

City is the best, say students

An award chosen by students ranks the University of Sussex as one of the best places to enjoy ‘city life’ in the UK.

Sussex is a top five winner in the ‘city life’ category of the Whatuni Student Choice Awards 2009, alongside London, Edinburgh, Leeds and Northumbria.

The awards are drawn from actual ratings given by students on the online university guide www.whatuni.com

Here is a selection of what Sussex students said about life on campus and in Brighton:

• “Diverse city, something for everyone. The beach on a sunny day is a real treat.”

• “Whether you want a quiet drink with friends or to party in to next month, Brighton has it all.”

• “The nightlife is better than anywhere else I’ve been to, and it’s great because there are lots of student deals.”

• “Work hard, play hard. Campus bars open til late. Some clubs in town open til 3am. Most open til 3am. Really great shopping too!”

• “Brighton is alive all day every day and all night.”

• “The campus is green & leafy. Take one bus & you are in Brighton which has lots of things to see & do.”

• “It’s not as big as London but we can say it’s simply compact. It’s got everything that you need only in a smaller space.”

The award certificate – signed by former Secretary of State for Education Estelle Morris – is on display in Sussex House reception.
Sussex achieves first milestone award as an ‘eco campus’

Sussex has received the first stage ‘bronze’ accreditation for an Environmental Management System (EMS), just 10 months after joining the scheme.

EcoCampus, funded by HEFCE, encourages, rewards and provides tools to assist universities in moving towards environmental sustainability and good operational and management practices.

Sussex was one of 13 universities to sign up to the scheme in August 2008 and has already reached the first of four accreditation stages – bronze, silver, gold and platinum.

Bronze is awarded on successful completion of the planning stage. This involved setting up the management structure, conducting baseline environmental reviews, redrafting the University’s environmental policy, establishing roles and responsibilities, conducting an evaluation of training needs, developing a training plan, and establishing a legal register of relevant environmental law.

Commenting on the award, Patrick Pica, Energy and Environment Manager and EcoCampus Project Manager for the University, said: “We are delighted to be one of only 20 universities nationally to have been awarded the bronze award of EcoCampus. “It signifies recognition in the higher education sector of a huge amount of work that has gone on in the background to identify, rank, and proactively improve our environmental performance. The commitment of senior management at Sussex to the scheme has been fantastic and sets us in good stead to successfully complete the programme.”

Receiving particular praise from the auditors was the standard of submission of documentation and systems, which was described by EcoCampus as “of the highest standard”. They also singled out the great involvement of Sussex’s senior management as “very commendable”.

Work will now continue to achieve the silver accreditation - the implementation phase - which focuses on environmental aspects and impacts, objectives, targets, and action programmes, and then embedding these into the environmental policy.

For more information go to www.ecocampus.co.uk

SPRU expert investigates climate change in Brighton and Hove

An expert from SPRU – Science and Technology Policy Research has agreed to help investigate the possible effects of climate change in Brighton and Hove and to review how the council should deal with it.

Professor Gordon MacKerron, SPRU’s director and one of the country’s leading experts in energy and environmental economics, will work alongside Brighton & Hove City Council to assess what needs to be done.

He will join a cross-party scrutiny panel, which also includes three local councillors, to address the particular issues the coastal city faces such as rising sea levels; hotter, drier summers; and milder, wetter winters.

Gordon, who has frequently been a specialist adviser to the government on energy subjects, said: “Adapting to climate change will be a continuous process. We all have an interest in making sure we are prepared and that we take steps to reduce its effects.”

The UK is already experiencing the effects of climate change, with more extreme weather conditions, so the panel will consider what measures can be taken to deal with flash flooding or drought and what effect they may have on council services.

Its work will include reviews of current flood and coastal plans and emergency planning for Brighton & Hove and the surrounding area.

The first panel meeting will be held on 27 July and meetings are expected to continue through the autumn.

Carbon mutual research wins environmental award

Sussex energy experts are celebrating after winning a prestigious Green Gown Award for their cutting-edge policy research into the transfer of low carbon technologies to developing countries.

The Sussex Energy Group, based at SPRU – Science and Technology Policy Research, won the award for most exceptional environment-related research at a ceremony in London on 23 June. Dr David Ockwell, leading the research team, received the award (right) from Kate Humble, presenter of BBC TV’s ‘Springwatch’ programme, and Baroness Warwick of Universities UK.

The award-winning research is assisting the UK government in developing policy in relation to a new international climate-change agreement to replace the Kyoto Protocol when it expires in 2012.

David said: “Winning a Green Gown Award means a tremendous amount to the University, and SPRU in particular, by demonstrating that, whilst low-carbon energy technologies are important, it is a robust policy framework which defines the propensity for innovation and the transfer to a low-carbon economy.”

Sussex’s research was shortlisted alongside innovative projects at the University of Birmingham, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Gloucestershire and Somerset College.

The winners were announced at Imperial College London in the presence of the Minister for Higher Education and Intellectual Property, David Lammy MP.

The Green Gown Awards – now in their fifth year – are administered by the Environmental Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC).

Students donate unwanted belongings

Every year when students move out of their halls of residence, they throw away a huge number of belongings that have been newly purchased and are still in good condition.

But this year the University took action to ensure that as much as possible was reused and/or recycled, instead of being thrown away and destined for landfill.

Students packing up for the summer vacation last week were asked to take their reusable items to designated areas.

Sacks and crates were provided for clothes, shoes, bedding, books, games, DVDs and CDs, crockery, kitchenware, bric-a-brac, jewellery, glass and small electrical items. Even non-perspirable food was included in the scheme.

A group of staff and volunteers sorted and packed the household goods before they were collected by Save the Children and local homeless charity First Base. The items will be provided at low cost to people in need or via charity shops.

Anything that might be suitable for new students, especially kitchen equipment and stationery, has been kept and Save the Children will organise a reuse sale at the beginning of the new academic year.
FIRST CLASS

Julie Corbin, a former student on CCE’s Certificate in Creative Writing, has signed a three-book publishing deal with publisher Hodder and Stoughton. Her first book, Tell Me No Secrets, was published in April and the paperback will be released on 23 July. A psychological thriller, it’s set in a Scottish fishing village and is the story of a woman’s fight to ensure her long-held secret doesn’t come back to haunt her. Julie, who studied with Catherine Smith in CCE, said: “The course at Sussex definitely set me off on the right foot – Catherine is a gifted teacher.” Her second novel will be published in 2010 and, again, is a psychological thriller – this time, set in Brighton.

Dr John Gribbin, Visiting Research Fellow in Astronomy, received a ‘lifetime achievement’ award at the sixth annual World Conference of Science Journalists in London on Thursday (2 July).

The first cultural study of letter-writing between British and American feminists from the 1970s to the present has won a £500 prize for its author, Dr Margaretha Jolly. Margaretha, Senior Lecturer in Life History, is joint winner of the 2009 Feminist and Women’s Studies Association (FWSA) book prize, a competition intended to recognise scholarship that is “innovative, interdisciplinary and grounded in feminist theory and practice”.

The prize attracted a large number of submissions and the quality of the field was extremely strong,” says the FWSA. Margaretha’s prize-winning book, In Love and Struggle: Letters in contemporary feminism, analyses letters between mothers and daughters, lesbian love letters, email novels, memoirs, and feminist activist communities on the Internet.

Business and Management student Emily Llewellyn, who receives a sports bursary from Sussex, was named British under-25 champion at the Bramham International Horse Trials in June. The 20-year-old has become the only rider ever to win all four age-related British Champion titles (under 16, under 18, under 21 and under 25). In the last year, Emily has also won a gold medal at the BUCS (British Universities and Colleges Sport) Equestrian Championship, won two gold medals in the Young Rider European Championships and was named the 2008 Sussex Young Sports Personality of the Year. She is representing Great Britain at the World Equestrian Festival in Germany from 2-4 July.

Professor Mary Stuart, Pro-Vice-Chancellor at Sussex from 2000–06, is to be the next Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln, Mary left Sussex in January 2006 to become Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Kingston University, where she has also undertaken the role of Acting Vice-Chancellor. She came to Sussex in 1991 to develop work in the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE) on widening participation. Mary became Assistant Director of CCE in 1995 and was Acting Director of the Institute of Education in 2000–01. She will take up the post at Lincoln on 1 November.

Three academics have been promoted to professorships: Peter Boxall (English), Katy Gardner (Anthropology) and Melanie Newport (Infectious Diseases).

Students Claire Harrison, Thomas Kingston, Prateek Sureka and Michał Tomaszewski – Team Enterprize – will represent the UK in the final of the GIMA (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) Global Business Challenge after finishing first out of 60 university teams in the national contest on 26 June.

Obituary


John Lowerson, Emeritus Reader in History and for many years a mainstay of the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), died very suddenly on 21 June.

A loyal Yorkshireman, born in Doncaster and a graduate of the University of Leeds, John came to Sussex in 1970.

His post involved both adult education and intramural teaching and in both capacities he was a dedicated and very supportive teacher and an apparently effortlessly accomplished and entertaining lecturer who could – and did – talk about almost anything, almost anywhere.

It was one of the ironies of his career that he developed a scholarly reputation as an historian of leisure despite having very little of it himself, apart from some fishing.


But this was only one strand of his activities. He also made a name for himself as a local historian, editing Southern History for a time, editing historical studies of Crawley and Seaford and publishing A Short History of Sussex in 1980.

Brought up a Methodist, which may partly explain his enduring love of music, he had become an Anglican and eventually trained as a non-stipendiary priest. In addition to his ‘day-job’ as a lecturer, and some parish responsibilities, he became part of the University chaplaincy team, a ‘worker priest’ within the academy.

He ‘retired’ in 2003 but he continued to lecture widely, completed his substantial book on Amateur Operatics: A social and cultural history (2005) and seemed for a time to have taken up permanent residence in the British Library while he worked assiduously on his biography of the communist composer Alan Bush.

Norman Vance, Professor of English

Sussex moves swiftly to recruit new Registrar and Secretary

The University is pressing ahead with the recruitment of its next Registrar and Secretary, following the announcement in May that Dr Philip Harvey has been appointed to the equivalent role at the University of Sheffield.

The post was advertised in the 18-24 June issue of the Times Higher Education magazine and search consultants Perrett Laver are working with the University on the recruitment process.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, said: “Getting a high-quality Registrar and Secretary to continue the excellent work that Philip has undertaken for Sussex is an absolute priority for us, and I am confident that this will prove an attractive opportunity.”

The University is keen to make the appointment process a swift one, capturing interest from across the higher education sector now and looking to interview before the end of July.

Dr Harvey’s last day at Sussex will be 18 September. Professor Farthing said: “I hope we will have someone in place as soon as possible and, by moving swiftly, we aim to keep to a minimum the period between Philip leaving and his successor being in post.”

In the short interim period before a new Registrar and Secretary is in post, a small number of existing Professional Services directors will be brought on to the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Group (VCEG) and will formally co-ordinate the work of their colleagues in the Professional Services Group (PSG).

This will be the Director of Human Resources, Jane Summerville (already a member of VCEG); the Academic Registrar, Owen Richards; and the Director of Research and Enterprise, Dr Ian Carter.

The specific details of this arrangement will be finalised in due course.
Student design puts an end to abandoned crutches

Lost crutches are the headache of hospital bosses everywhere, costing the NHS up to £50,000 a year to replace. But a Product Design student has devised a solution that could stem the flow of haemorrhaging equipment costs.

"Each pair of crutches costs the NHS £20 but over 50% never get returned," said student designer Alex Williams. "I've worked through several prototypes to strengthen all the different stress points to make a recyclable crutch that's even stronger than the original but at a much reduced cost."

Not only are the crutches cheap to make, adaptable and funky, they are designed to be recycled; patients could simply put the crutches in their recycling box instead of returning them to a hospital.

Alex's crutches were on display at the Product Design students' final-year show in Brighton from 18-20 June.

Thirty-two student projects were on show including a hand-held device by Jonathan Casey that is set to revolutionise communication within mountain rescue teams who need to stay in touch under extreme conditions and span large areas very quickly.

Also showing his work was Ben Thomson, who has designed a range of fasteners to simplify the disassembly of electronic products. If brought to manufacture, Ben's clips could reduce landfill by transforming the manufacture and recycling of electrical goods.

Dramatic climax to degree

An evening of newly devised music theatre, musical installation and composition on 22 June showcased the degree work of four postgraduates on the MA in Opera and Music Theatre.

Hearing Me Watching You, by Greg Mickelborough, was described as "an invitation to participate in a theatrical event where sounds, music, and voices all combine to try and change your perception of the space you are in and of each other". As well as working towards his MA, Greg is a pianist and conductor and musical director of a Brighton-based music theatre company.

Adèle Bates devised Voice Manifested, a "theatrical examination of two voices in performance". The theatre practitioner and classical singer used a vocal performance to convey the human nature of the voice, compared to other instruments.

Fellow student Rikka Jokelainen directed Presents, a "collaborative collage" of four performers that started life without a concept, story or situation.

Finally, My Brain and Tongue Just Met, by Vicky Tremain, was a composition for voice using extended vocal technique. Vicky is a composer and musician with several Brighton-based groups.

The MA in Opera and Music Theatre is a new degree, having started in autumn 2007.

A walk on the wild side

We have written before at this time of year of the colony of Pyramidal Orchids (below) in the narrow strip of woodland in the Science car park (P1). This year they have produced their most stunning display yet.

Readers may recall that the first plants appeared in 2001, when we found a small group of five. This year, just eight years later, there are about 320 (there having been about 50 in 2005).

Rapid increases in population numbers of this attractive species seem to be no means unusual. For instance, Michael Foley at the University of Lancaster reports finding a few plants at a disused industrial site in Cumbria in 1980 which within six years had increased to over 900 - and by 1991 there were thousands and too many for him to count!

There are at least two other colonies on campus; it will be interesting to see if these tiny clusters spread in the future.

Pyramidal Orchids are aptly named from the shape of the young inflorescences. The deep-pink flowers are densely packed and each sports a long, narrow, curved spur at its back. The wall of the spur secretes a sugary sap that can be reached only by butterflies and day-flying moths with a suitably long proboscis. In the process the pollen masses, pollinia, become stuck to the insect's head by a sticky pad and are thus transferred to the next plant visited.

Pyramidal Orchids were first recorded in Britain by the great 17th-century Cambridge botanist, John Ray, when he reported finding them 'in a chalky close at Hinton' (presumably Cherry Hinton).

At this time of year, we receive many reports from readers about large animals behaving 'badly'. This year these included: red foxes carrying rabbits and bargeing past pedestrians in broad daylight at two very obvious dens on campus; Herring Gulls mugging picnickers on lawns, or killing baby birds up to the size of a young Carrion Crow; Carrion Crows eating Herring Gull eggs and chicks.

We were just as fascinated by reports of insects doing very little. To our surprise and delight, two Privet Hawk Moths were delivered to the JMS building within half an hour of each other on 22 June. Both had been found resting on brick walls (on the Arundel Building and Library building).

This is one of our largest resident moths (wing span up to 12 cm) and when it emerges in June or July usually rests on tree trunks, where the grey and brown forewings are better camouflaged than on bricks.

Perhaps the campus ones had only just emerged - they pupate deep in the soil - and were still confused. Had a predator startled them, they would have had to rely on a second line of defence by opening their wings to expose pink markings on their hind-wings and pink and black stripes on their abdomen.
Talks celebrate Englishman behind America's revolution

A day of public lectures organised by the University of Sussex will launch this year’s Tom Paine Festival in Lewes.

The Tom Paine Forum: Politics and Revolution on Saturday (4 July) marks the 200th anniversary of the death of the radical thinker.

Tom Paine lived in Lewes from 1768 to 1774. There he developed his ideas about society, government and politics before he abandoned England in disgust at its imperial ways for the American colonies. Just two years later, he became one of the Founding Fathers of American independence and went on to co-author the republican French constitution in 1793.

Book-ended by Independence Day (4 July) and Bastille Day (14 July), the Tom Paine Festival celebrates Paine’s links with Lewes, the progressive politics of which, it is argued, led Paine to develop his extraordinary career.

The lectures, organised by the Sussex Centre for Intellectual History and funded by the School of Humanities and the Teaching and Learning Development Unit (TLDU), take place at Lewes Town Hall.

Scholars from the universities of Cambridge, Oxford, Warwick, York and Exeter will discuss Paine’s life, work and historical importance, as well as contemporary opinion expressed in the colourful satirical caricatures of the period.

Organiser and Reader in Intellectual History Dr Richard Whatmore (pictured top right) will convene the event. He says: “Tom Paine’s political ideas were among the most radical ever expressed by an Englishman, entailing the abolition of monarchy, aristocracy and national church.

“Paine was also one of the most gifted pamphleteers of the age, and one of the very few whose ideas penetrated the masses.

“His words and ideas continue to interest, and on occasion inspire, students and the general public. As a rare democrat in an aristocratic age, Paine still has much to say to us about politics, religion and international relations.

“For these reasons we are delighted to be able to contribute to the Paine Festival, to make an educational link between the University and the local community and to create a permanent teaching resource.”

The University is involved in further projects to ensure Tom Paine scholarship of the future:

- The lectures will be filmed, thanks to funding from the TLDU, and will be available on the Sussex Centre for Intellectual History’s web page during the summer.
- The films will form part of the teaching materials for an ongoing ‘global-interactive’ new course on Tom Paine, which runs via a live online link-up between the University of Sussex and Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, USA;
- The University has established a research studentship, with additional funding from local brewers Harvey’s of Lewes. The current holder is studying for a doctorate and will be investigating the reaction of contemporaries to Tom Paine’s ideas.

Programme shapes up for Sussex's 50th anniversary

As Sussex approaches its 50th anniversary in 2011–12, a series of events is being planned that will recognise the University’s achievements so far, while looking towards the future in education and research.

After suggestions from students, staff and alumni on how they would like to celebrate the University’s half century, the formative programme is shaping up and will feature activities such as:

- a lecture series of high-profile speakers featuring honorary graduands, alumni and Nobel prize winners;
- a collaboration with Turner prize-winning

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