New approach to course evaluation rolls out

All Sussex students will be using a new system to evaluate the courses they have taken, starting this term.

A new anonymous course evaluation questionnaire (CEQ) is being implemented across the University, following a successful pilot in 2008.

The CEQ contains a common set of questions and provides the opportunity for departments to add their own.

Students will complete the CEQ via Sussex Direct and will be able to view summary results and comments from course convenors online.

Professor Joanne Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), said: “We have been targeting particular efforts in recent years to improving how we provide helpful feedback to students. I am pleased that students have recognised the progress we have made with improved scores on this measure in the last two National Student Surveys.

“Of course there is always more that we can do and the CEQ is an important development, making it much easier and quicker for students to give and receive feedback on the courses they study at Sussex.”

Key benefits of the new CEQ include:
- Students are given the opportunity to comment on their overall experience of the course.
- Departments determine which courses should be included, when CEQs should open and close and when results should be released.
- Easy, at-a-glance analysis of responses is available to course convenors as soon as the questionnaire closes.
- CEQ results are viewable by teaching group.
- There is a straightforward mechanism for course convenors to provide comments on responses.
- Students receive CEQ results and feedback more quickly than in a paper-based process.

The new CEQ was developed by a Teaching and Learning Committee working group, as part of a wider University strategy to review and revise the opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences of studying at Sussex.

Dr Helen Prance, Reader in Engineering, was a member of the CEQ working group and was involved in the testing of the pilot CEQ. She said: “This common format CEQ has been developed and piloted over an extended period of time, with significant input from students, academics and professional services staff.

“I am particularly pleased with both the questions themselves and also the fact that students can access the questionnaire and results via Sussex Direct, which we know students access regularly.

“Completion of the CEQs is very straightforward for them and, equally importantly, the results and the feedback from convenors can be made public promptly after the end of the course.”

More information can be found at www.sussex.ac.uk/i/idu/ceq

Inside

2 Kipling
Student's research to be displayed in the author's Sussex home.

3 Future of HE
What the Government's new framework means for Sussex.

4 Altered ads
Sussex body image expert calls for ban on airbrushing models.

5 iUniversity
Sussex launches iPhone video site for streaming lectures.

6 Obituary
John Bannow, who taught at Sussex for 26 years, died on 3 Nov.
Student’s Kipling research presented to National Trust

University-funded research by a Sussex undergraduate into Rudyard Kipling’s correspondence is to go on display at Bateman’s, the author’s East Sussex home.

Final-year English literature student Nick Skidmore undertook the research, supervised by Senior Lecturer in English Dr Alastair Davies, as part of the Junior Research Associate (JRA) bursary scheme, which gives second-year undergraduates interested in pursuing further study a chance to try postgraduate research during the summer months.

Now Nick’s research, which was presented at a special exhibition for JRA bursary-holders’ work, will go on display at Bateman’s, the Kipling family home near Burwash, which is now in the care of the National Trust.

Nick visited Bateman’s, a splendid Jacobean house, and spent time in Kipling’s study, which remains as a shrine to the writer of Kim, The Jungle Book and poems such as If.

Nick says: “Bateman’s gives the public a wonderful opportunity to explore Kipling’s home and delve into the heavily guarded private life of one of our great writers, a man whose work brought so much joy, yet whose life was tinged with sadness. It’s a considerable honour to have the opportunity to display my research there.”

Kipling had to come to terms with the death of his only son John, who was killed in action in the Battle of Loos in 1915.

Nick chose to study Kipling and his complex relationship with the British Empire and the First World War, making use of the University archive of Kipling papers, housed in the Library’s Special Collections.

The collection includes Kipling’s correspondence with his son, including John’s last letter from the Front.

Nick says: “It is Kipling’s poem The Children that is, perhaps, the most haunting of Kipling’s verses about the Great War. It does not linger on politics, or vendetta but rather demonstrates the tortuous workings of the imagination amongst the echoes of the refrain ‘But who shall return us our children?’ It is here we find Kipling at his most honest.”

Elaine Francis-Truett, Property Manager for Bateman’s, says: “It is a pleasure to support Nick in his research by displaying the culmination of his study here at Bateman’s.

“The hard work undertaken by Nick will help our visitors discover even more about the private life of the Kipling family, the hardships they endured along with all families involved in the Great War and hope that this will reveal even more of Kipling the family man, alongside that of Kipling the great author.”

Culture and universities “boost coastal town fortunes”

Cultural and artistic initiatives that boost fading seaside towns would have a more long-lasting effect if business, government and universities worked together more closely, says new research from the University of Sussex.

The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) study, South East Coastal Towns: Economic challenges and cultural regeneration, is the result of research by Sussex Professor Fred Gray and cultural regeneration expert David Powell.

It highlights the hitherto unexplored potential of universities and colleges to contribute to and support cultural regeneration in coastal towns. The authors advocate the involvement of local colleges and universities in such projects to help ensure their long-term success – a vital factor when it comes to meaningful regeneration with beneficial knock-on benefits for communities.

However, the current climate of recession and threatened spending cuts, the authors argue, presents a real challenge to using culture and education to stimulate rundown coastal communities.

Mr Powell and Professor Gray, who is an expert on the cultural and architectural history of seaside resorts, examined how cultural activity has helped to revitalise economic prospects in four seaside towns in the south-east: Bognor Regis, Folkestone, Margate and Portsmouth.

- **Bognor Regis**: 21st-century facilities for holidaymakers at Butlin’s; higher education initiatives taking place, but little in the way of integrated activity around town centre/cultural quarter development
- **Folkestone**: Development of literary and other festivals, provision of higher education courses; a new ‘cultural quarter’ via grass-roots entrepreneurship and the involvement of universities and colleges
- **Margate**: Investment in the Turner contemporary art gallery; plans to turn the Dreamland amusement park into the first amusement park of historic rides; higher education yet to play a role in Margate’s regeneration
- **Portsmouth**: Has developed a reputation for maritime and heritage appeal in partnership with the University of Portsmouth, an established university and substantial regeneration partner.

Professor Gray says: “Decades of poverty and low self-esteem take more than a few time-limited projects to remedy.

“Cultural, educational and civic bodies need to work together effectively to make their towns work better.

“Higher education institutions need to deliver effective ways of engaging with and supporting local cultural organisations and networks, and of delivering professional development and management support to small cultural businesses.”

The authors conclude that government should continue to treat coastal towns as a special group in need of continued development through investment in cultural and educational infrastructure. Government should also encourage the kind of cultural and educational enterprise that has taken place in the four study towns and cities.
Students’ Union agrees to work with University to sort out USSU finances

The Students’ Union has said that it will work with the University to improve the Union’s financial position, after discussion with the Strategy and Resources Committee of the University on 10 November.

Unless the Union takes action to sort its finances, it will be spending over £90,000 more than it receives this year, using up its limited financial reserves.

The Students’ Union receives around £700,000 a year - the vast majority of its funding - directly from the University. This fund currently supports its operation as a Union, its support for clubs and societies and the running of Union advice services to students.

The Union normally plans its total spending to include an additional £100,000 of profit from its shops and bars on campus from a turnover of £3.4m. In practice, it didn’t manage to achieve any surplus last year (2008-09) and had to spend £120,000 of its limited financial reserves to break even.

The Committee was concerned that, if the Union continued on this path, it would be placing itself in a financially unsustainable position. Such an approach would place the continued operation of the Union at severe risk.

The Committee said it wants to see a successful and financially sustainable Students’ Union at Sussex, and that the Committee needs to have confidence in the Union’s plans for the future.

The Committee asked the Union to work with the University’s Professional Services teams to take action to address its finances in ways that protect services to students.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Layzell, said: “We are pleased that the Union has said it will now work with the University to address its own finances and come up with sustainable plans for a secure future.”

The Union had originally suggested that its position was due to reductions in University funding, a suggestion rejected by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

Professor Layzell said: “The University made clear to the Union six months ago that it would be reducing its total annual grant by 3% (from £706,000 to £886,000) as part of cost savings required across the University.

“However, this reduction on its own is not the problem. The fundamental issue facing the Union is that it had continued to plan to spend £90,000 more than its total income, and had so far not put its own house in order.

“We will support the Union in carrying such plans forward.”

What the HE Framework means for us

The government’s major new Higher Education (HE) Framework sends clear messages about the future of Higher Education development to which Sussex needs to be alert and responsive.

On 3 November the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published its long-awaited paper on Higher Education. This framework is timely as it will help inform the decisions that need to be made within Sussex to address the need for an academically and financially sustainable future.

The government has reconfirmed a strong emphasis on fair access, with a recommitment to the 50% participation target. In delivering this, there will be an important role for Further Education (FE) colleges (as set out in the more recent Skills Strategy also published by Government). The University’s strategy of engaging with FE more effectively will help place Sussex in a stronger position than in the past.

The framework also places priority on programmes that deliver higher level skills needed in the UK economy, with increased emphasis on competition between universities for funding, rewarding those that “best respond to the evolving economic challenges” and reduced funding for courses that “fail to meet high standards of quality or outcome”. This reinforces the importance of our drive to improve employability of our graduates, through curriculum development and major new initiatives such as Sussex Plus and Postgrad Plus.

In relation to research, the framework states that “more research concentration, not less” is the continued direction of travel. The clear message that research excellence can only be sustained by universities’ ever greater focus and concentration, meshes well with Sussex’s own research strategy. It also underlines the urgent need for Sussex to deal with areas of weak research performance and build-up activity in areas of strength and significant potential.

The framework also develops the important theme of transparency of information, building on the work of the National Student Survey (NSS), to ensure that universities are setting out clearly how and what students learn. This reinforces the continued need to refine the University’s taught portfolio, as well as making the benefits of a Sussex degree more explicit and consistent.

The final major theme in the framework relates to the financial outlook for Higher Education – and states that “maintaining the current level of per capita funding through public expenditure alone will be extremely difficult”. This is the clearest signal yet that public funding of Higher Education will decline in future years and that growth will need to be funded from outside the public purse. It confirms that the Sussex focus on developing other sources of funding will need to remain at the heart of our strategy for growth.

There are proposals contained in the framework which extend beyond the immediate work that is in hand to develop the University’s academic and professional services activities. The Vice-Chancellor will therefore be commissioning five working groups to review the major themes – access and entry to HE, programmes and outcomes, research and its impact, internationalisation, and funding – that are set out by the HE Framework. These will report to the executive by mid-2010.

And while a general election next year may see a change of government, the emphasis on research concentration, skills and employability outcomes, transparency of information and accountability to students, and a squeeze on public funding, are likely to be key features of any future HE policy.

As part of the 1994 Group of leading research-intensive universities, Sussex’s formal response to the framework is reflected in the statement made by the Chair of the Group. The full text of the HE framework is available from www.bis.gov.uk and the 1994 Group response can be found at www.1994group.ac.uk
News in brief ↓

Downs Restaurant Christmas lunches

The Downs Restaurant on level one of Bramber House will be serving Christmas lunches on Tuesday 8, Thursday 10 and Thursday 17 December. To book, email c.turnbull@sussex.ac.uk or call ext 8221: it's £6.50 for two courses or £7.50 for three.

Carols by candlelight

All are welcome at the carol service on Sunday 6 December, from 6-7.30pm in the Meeting House Chapel. The service features the University Chamber Choir, led by James Lloyd-Thomas, and will be followed by mulled wine and mince pies.

Donate your unwanted books

A book bank has been installed outside York House. Donations to this and the clothes bank next to it will be sold in British Heart Foundation charity shops.

Sue’s Xmas TV launch

Professor Sue Hartley was the guest of honour at the Royal Institution's 2009 Christmas lecture launch party this week. Sue is this year's presenter of the prestigious lecture series, which will be broadcast on More4 during the Christmas period. She follows in the footsteps of Susan Greenfield and David Attenborough and will be talking about the 300 million-year war between plants and animals.

And finally...

Product design students teamed up with celebrity interior designer Oliver Heath to transform a Sussex family's home using “upcycled” or discarded furniture and goods. The challenge was part of a TV report "living for free". The team of 33 mainly second-year students, who study Product Design with tutors Diane Simpson-Little, Mark Jenkins and Cathy Grundy, spent a week helping to complete the project. Their efforts can be viewed on Tonight With Trevor McDonald on ITV1 Meridian on Friday, 27 November, at 8pm.

Airbrushed ads damaging a generation of young women, say experts

A Sussex psychologist is the lead author of a report sent to UK advertising authorities condemning the use of ultra-thin, digitally altered women in adverts.

Dr Helga Dittmar collaborated with experts in the field of body image to produce the paper, which details scientific evidence on how the use of airbrushing to promote body perfect ideals in advertising is causing a host of problems in young women. These include eating disorders, depression, extreme exercising and encouraging cosmetic surgery.

The report, signed by 44 leading academics, doctors and clinical psychologists from the UK, USA, Australia, Brazil, Spain and Ireland, was submitted to the Committee for Advertising Practice on 9 November as part of a campaign co-ordinated by the Liberal Democrat party, headed by Jo Swinson MP.

Helga says: "It is clear that most fashion advertising uses airbrushing technology, capable of changing all aspects of appearance and body shape - for example, different size eyes, thinner legs, skinnier waists and enlarged breasts.

"More than 100 scientific studies show that exposure to unrealistic body perfect ideals like this in the media leads to body dissatisfaction, negative thoughts and feeling about the body, for the majority of girls and women."

She says the evidence suggests that adolescents are more vulnerable than adults and that young children also show negative effects on body image. "We want to make sure that girls are educated about the unrealistic media ideals as part of the school curriculum and be sure that policy changes are used to curb the use of artificial and unhealthy body perfect ideals in the media, particularly in under 16s."

Liberal Democrat MP Jo Swinson said: "This paper spells out the real damage irresponsible airbrushing is doing to young women's physical and mental health."

"The Advertising Standards Agency received five complaints about airbrushed images last year. This year thanks to our campaign it has had almost 1,000. It now has all the scientific evidence it needs to act."

Sussex launches new ‘global’ school

CNN news anchor and Sussex graduate Becky Anderson officially launched the new School of Global Studies on 12 November with a live link-up to academic staff and students working in India and California.

Ms Anderson, who holds a BA in Economics and French from Sussex, said: "At CNN my viewers rely on me for accurate reporting of issues affecting the whole world. I couldn't do that without the knowledge, expertise and passion of the academics and students at leading institutions such as the University of Sussex.

The University is building on an already excellent reputation in the field and intends the new School to become one of the UK's premier centres for education on global affairs.

The School will deliver undergraduate programmes in international relations, anthropology, geography and international development, as well as a range of specialist postgraduate programmes in subjects such as international security and climate change.

Professor Richard Black, the Head of School, said: "Sussex has been characterised by its international outlook and its interdisciplinary character since it was founded in the 1960s, and the School reflects all that is good about the University's engaged approach to international issues."

During the live link-up Ms Anderson interviewed Dr Maya Unnithan, who is in India conducting research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Department for International Development (DFID) on maternal and child health in the country.

The CNN anchor woman also interviewed Miriam Budgenbinder, who is currently on a year of international study at the University of California, Berkeley.

Miriam explained: "I'm studying International Political Economy and Economic and Political Development at Berkeley but I'm looking forward to the continuation of my studies in Sussex.

"I enjoy the fact that the School of Global Studies is very critical of mainstream theories, which creates an extremely motivating atmosphere.

"As a German/Iranian student I also like that the environment in Sussex is very international."

The School of Global Studies embraces the different and complementary perspectives of international students, as Professor Black explained: "Approximately one-third of the School's undergraduate students and two-thirds of our postgraduates come from international backgrounds. We also have a strongly international curriculum, with opportunities for study abroad embedded in our degree programmes."
Informatics launches iPhone video site

A new lecture-streaming service has been rolled out to desktop computers and iPhones.

Over the last year, Dr Phil Watten and Dr Paul Newbury in the School of Informatics have been experimenting with 'televisioning' live lectures and offering them to students for download so that they can review them at a later date.

Phil says: "Televisioning lectures is the next step on from podcasting. It offers the lecture in a format similar to what you might see on TV, rather than the traditional webcam and a screen-capture approach."

The lecturer is visible and edited live with slides, graphics and a number of different shots. "This gives the audience a more involved experience," says Phil. "They feel like they are at a real lecture rather than watching a recording, helping to enhance the learning experience."

In addition to lectures, numerous demos have been produced with the same technique to help students in laboratories. "This has had a really positive impact on teaching," says Phil, "as it gives the individual students the opportunity to learn in a way suited to them, providing as close to one-to-one tuition as can be possible with large student numbers."

One of the achievements has been to make the lectures viable on multiple platforms. They have to work simultaneously in the live lecture, on a large-screen desktop computer and on an iPhone or iPod with a small screen size.

In all cases, the text, graphics and lecturer need to be comfortably visible, so the lecture slides have been carefully designed along with the lighting of the lecturer, screen area and audience.

One of the added bonuses is that communication support can be included to aid accessibility at no extra cost to the production. For example, while a live lecture is running, sign language may be being provided. In this case, the communication support worker is superimposed onto the video, making it accessible to everyone on the course.

This televised approach has been very popular with the students and has prompted research into bringing these techniques into more traditional lecture environments. A prototype, developed in Informatics, is currently being used successfully to record all of the Sussex Professional Lectures.

See
www.informatics.sussex.ac.uk/mttlive/videos.php

Best student award goes to e-learning wiz

When Sussex student Tim Vincent was working on his online guides for student doctors, he never considered that they had award-winning potential.

All that changed on 12 November, when he was presented with the Wired Sussex Prize for Best Student on the PG Certificate in E-Learning Design course at a 'Make It Into Media' event at the Brighton Corn Exchange.

Tim said: "I am extremely touched to receive the Wired Sussex Prize for the top student and am grateful to the course team for their support and enthusiasm in delivering an excellent course."

Tim works as the Learning Technologist for the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS), and produced some brilliant pieces of e-learning on medical themes during the course, earning him the highest overall mark of 79.5 per cent.

His projects included a game-based e-learning package designed to help medical students learn about human anatomy. "Body Builders? The Human Anatomy Challenge" challenges students to construct a virtual human body.

In another project Tim produced an online video and graphics-based resource aimed at helping medical students learn the clinical skills of the neurological examination.

Evident in all of Tim’s work was a real desire to understand his learners, a deep knowledge of theories about how people learn, and impeccable design skills.

But it wasn’t just his work that impressed the judges, as Dr Judith Good, Director of IDEAs Lab at the School of Informatics, explained: "Although this doesn’t enter into the criteria for the award, Tim was a fantastic 'citizen' during the course, and went out of his way several times to help other students who were struggling. All the lecturers feel that the award couldn’t have gone to a more deserving person."

Record your lecture

A number of teaching rooms are now equipped with the facility for automatic digital lecture capture (audio and slides), i.e. podcasts.

They are Arts A1, Arts C133, the Chichester Lecture Theatre, Pevensey 1A6 and Pevensey 1A7.

A number of teaching staff have already used the system, 'Echo360'.

Dr Bill Ashraf, Director of Technology Enhanced Learning, says: "We have received extremely positive feedback from both staff and students."

"Now our students can listen to their lectures on the move via their iPods, iPhones or mp3 players as Sussex makes education more portable than ever before."

Bill is happy to receive feedback and to answer any questions: E bill.ashraf@sussex.ac.uk

New Senate members elected

The membership of Senate for 2010 is now finalised, following an election process.

Two members of academic staff from each new school (and BSMS) were eligible for election, as well as two members elected by and from the professional services.

Members usually serve for two years, with half of the places falling vacant each year on 31 July. However, due to changes in the composition of Senate following the restructuring of the academic schools, half of the new members will serve for only one year to ensure a rotating membership in the future.

For the outcome of the election, see www.sussex.ac.uk/goverance/1-4-6-3.html
Obituary
John Wyon Burrow, 1935-2009

Professor John Burrow, who taught at Sussex from 1969 to 1995, died of cancer on 3 November at his home in Witney, Oxfordshire.

Sussex was the first university in this country to offer degrees in intellectual history, and John was the first to occupy the chair in this branch of history created for him in 1981. He held this post until he moved to the Chair of European Thought at Oxford in 1995, prior to his retirement in 2000.

John was first appointed to a ‘contextual’ post in the School of Social Sciences, where he taught the third-year course on the history and philosophy of the social sciences, otherwise known as ‘Concepts, Methods, and Values’ (CMV).

He had already published a path-breaking book, Evolution and Society (1966) that dealt with the influence of evolutionary theories on the social sciences during the 19th century. It was to herald the arrival of a more sophisticated way of writing the history of the social sciences.

Alongside two Sussex colleagues with whom he taught CMV, Professor Stefan Collini and myself, he went on to write a book on That Noble Science of Politics (1983) that extended this approach and laid the foundation for what later became known as the ‘Sussex school of intellectual history’.

Although John left Sussex in 1995, he retained a link through the Centre for Intellectual History, whose activities he supported by participating in its symposia.

In any future history of this university his career will be cited as vindication of the fluidity of the early structures and the distinction and distinctiveness of what could flourish within them.

Donald Winch, Emeritus Professor (Centre for Intellectual History)

Sporty staff sought for county-wide comp

Teams of University staff will take on teams from other Sussex organisations and businesses in a series of sporting competitions over the next year.

The University of Sussex has signed up for the Battle of the Businesses sports series, organised by the Sussex County Sports Partnership. Organisations from across the county have signed up to enter teams for contests in six sports: netball, basketball, cricket, golf, football (five-a-side) and beach volleyball.

Sussexsport – the University’s sports service – is now urging staff of all abilities who want to represent the University to get in touch.

The first competition is a netball tournament on Wednesday 25 November (6-8pm) at the G4S netball centre, East Grinstead.

The other tournaments are:
- Basketball (Moulscoomb Leisure Centre, 26 Jan 2010)
- Cricket (University of Brighton, Falmer campus, 30 March 2010)
- Golf (Mid Sussex Golf Club, Hassocks, 13 July 2010)
- Football (Sussex FA, Lancing, 9 May 2010)
- Beach volleyball (Yellowwave, September 2010)

Both women and men are needed for all sports (all teams are mixed, except football which will have a men’s and a women’s team).

If you wish to take part in the upcoming netball tournament or any future Battle of the Businesses event then please contact Terry Cooper, Health and Fitness Development Officer, on T.Cooper@sussex.ac.uk or ext. 8345.

Order your Sussex Christmas card now

This year’s Sussex Christmas card is now available to order.

The card showcases the work of Martin Todd, who has recently joined Sussex as a Professor of Climate Change.

It shows a satellite image of a Saharan sandstorm, taken above the Bodéle Depression in northern Chad on Christmas Day 2005.

The red dots denote small brush fires, many associated with seasonal farming activities. The smoke from this large-scale burning mingle with dust from the Bodéle to create a strong impact on weather, climate and human health.

Martin has investigated what makes the Bodéle Depression unique. The vast plumes of dust are created by strong winds, focused by mountains to the north and east on to what is now the exposed bed of an ancient lake. The dust is transported across West Africa, the Atlantic and South America. Remarkably, about half of all dust carried across the Atlantic originates from this single location.

The picture shows the complexity of the climate system, highlighting the challenges for scientists in making predictions of the future. Sussex has recently launched a multidisciplinary climate change initiative to look at the climate system, climate change impacts, and the associated policy challenges.

The cards are available to order now, at 60p each, and will be printed by the end of November in plenty of time for last posting dates. A small number will also be on sale from Sussex House reception during December.

To order cards, email Sara Adamson at sarad@sussex.ac.uk, with your budget code and the number of cards you would like. An electronic version of the card is also available, if preferred.

First Class

Champion eventer and Sussex student Emily Llewellyn has been named Sussex Young Sports Personality for the second year running. The Business and Management Studies student - who receives a sports bursary from Sussex - was presented with the award at a ceremony at the Hilton Brighton Metropole hotel on 13 November. Emily was one of five youngsters in the running for the prestigious title, which she also won in 2008. The 20-year-old has won several national events in 2009, and helped the youth GB team to retain the gold medal at this year’s European Championships.

The Society for General Microbiology has awarded a £150 prize to a final-year Molecular Genetics student for an outstanding piece of coursework. Rebecca Whyte’s second-year coursework involved writing up and analysing data obtained from both laboratory experiments and bioinformatics analyses. The latter work interested Rebecca so much that she is now doing her final-year project in this field. The prize includes a year’s membership of the society.
CCE and Kew collaboration continues

The Vanishing Meadows Exhibition at Wakehurst Place is over, but collaboration between the Centre for Community Engagement (CCE) and Kew at Wakehurst Place continues.

On a wet day towards the end of October, ten volunteers from CCE's River Ouse project were busy planting 640 wildflower plants into a field trial at Sheffield Park - ideal conditions for the plants if not for those doing the planting!

The field trial will compare the effectiveness of two grassland-enhancement techniques for putting back the wildflowers into agriculturally degraded/species-poor meadows: sowing wildflower seed or inserting plant plugs into the sward.

Plant-plug creation began a year ago when the seed used in the field trial was harvested from hay meadows in the Weald by the Weald Meadows Initiative.

A small amount of this seed was used by Wakehurst's Conservation and Woodlands Manager and his team to grow 64 plugs of each of ten wildflower species. The remaining seed was stored in Kew's Millennium Seed Bank at Wakehurst Place so that the same seed could be used for sowing in the field trial this October.

The meadow at Sheffield Park lies alongside the river Ouse and has been extensively studied by the Ouse Project team.

Historical research, including interviews with farmers, shows that it was used as a hay meadow until the latter half of the last century and that it was full of cowslips until fertiliser was applied.

Now it has very few wildflowers. It floods for a few days several times each winter when the river is in peak flow and so acts as a washland: storing water temporarily and helping to prevent flooding downstream. Putting back the wildflowers is good news for butterflies and bumble bees.

The long-term aim of the project is to restore flower-rich washland meadows along the river Ouse by linking biodiversity objectives for meadow grassland (a Biodiversity Action Plan target) to flood alleviation.

A walk on the wild side

Wandering through the Tenant Laine belt recently we came across a small self-sown bush of Box. Not particularly surprising perhaps as there are plenty in the woods in Stammer Park.

However, Box has a number of interesting tales to tell. As its seeds are simply dropped from the evergreen plant, they do not travel far. The standard florists tell us that the Box is a true native and in Sussex it turns up pretty frequently in chalk woodlands, especially on the western downs.

A look at its distribution map, however, reveals a more complicated story. Although it is spread throughout much of the British Isles, its native sites are now restricted to no more than two or three localities on the chalk of southern England, where it is associated with steep south- or west-facing cliffs.

Before decamping from Sussex to the University of Western England, Richard Coates (a Professor of Linguistics who specialises in the origin of place-names in England) examined the coincidence of these sites with Box place names such as Box Hill in Surrey and Boxley in Kent. So how do we explain the frequency of Box in other parts of the country?

There seems little doubt that it was brought here by the Romans who used it, as we do today, in garden landscaping. This leaves us with a problem. Are the ancestors of the Box scrub growing on the river cliff of the Anu at Arundel native Box or escapes from the gardens of local Roman villas? Exactly the same question is posed by our young plant growing on Tenant Laine. Although Roman artefacts have been found around campus, more likely sources are much more recent gardeners.

Readers will have spotted the plethora of holes being dug all over campus as part of the "signage" project directed by Louisa Way in EFM. Two of the temporary human inhabitants of one excavation waylaid us with the news that they had found a snail that "had outgrown its shell".

To our surprise and delight, this was a Shield Slug (above), a species we had not previously seen on campus. Like Box, this is primarily a Mediterranean species, which, although probably native here in the south, is often accidentally introduced by gardeners.

Many different groups of snails (local name "snags") that burrow underground have reduced their potentially cumbrous shell.

There are many different grades of shell reduction between snails that can completely withdraw into their shell to those so-called "slugs" that have no sign of a shell. Shield Slugs belong to the so-called "shelled slugs", which have a tiny shell on their tails. From the shell, into which they cannot withdraw, two characteristic furrows run towards the head.

Shield Slugs are yellowish beasts that are rarely seen, despite being up to 12 cm long. They spend their lives underground hunting earthworms and slugs, detecting their prey by smell and hanging on with their sharp, backward-pointing teeth.

South Downs National Park confirmed

The government has clarified the precise boundaries of the new South Downs National Park - which will almost entirely surround the University of Sussex campus - and confirmed the date when it will be established.

The RT Hon Hilary Benn MP, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, announced on 12 November that the National Park will come into being on 31 March 2010.

Designation as a National Park (first announced on 31 March) is a formal recognition of the South Downs' special qualities in terms of natural beauty and opportunities for open-air recreation. It means that the 632 square-mile area will have the highest level of protection under the planning system.

Mr Benn also revealed on 12 November that the intention is for the South Downs National Park Authority to be formally created on 1 April 2010 and to become operational (taking on its full range of statutory powers, functions and responsibilities) from 1 April 2011.

The Authority will be a new partner for Sussex as it continues to meet the needs of a growing institution, in harmony with the local landscape.

Aside from helping to preserve the surrounding countryside, designated the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) until 31 March 2010, the operation and development of the University should not be altered by this new designation.

The reason for this is that the development of the University is already tacitly agreed, with appropriate planning permissions reflecting the remarkable surrounding environment and with sensitivity, using the palette of natural materials of brick, concrete, glass and copper set out by the founding Sussex architect, Sir Basil Spence.

The overarching Campus Development Plan, which was first developed in 2004 and provides the framework for all future development at Sussex, has been a key part of the University's successful approach with the statutory authorities.

Local councils and conservation bodies have strongly endorsed the approach taken by Sussex, which means developing buildings on the campus fits within an approved planning framework.
Academic events

MON 23 NOV
5pm Education seminar: Míreáid Dunne and Russell King (Sussex), Applying for higher education abroad. Arts D110.

TUE 24 NOV
2pm SEI seminar: Simon Hix (LSE), The 2009 European elections and the new European Parliament, Russell 33.
4.15pm Anthropology seminar: Giovanni Orlando (SOAS), Fairtrade retail co-operatives in Palermo (Italy). Arts C233.

THU 26 NOV
5pm Development lecture: Alex Monaci (Sussex), Colonialism, agriculture and the long-run paths of human development in Africa. Chichester lecture theatre.

TUE 1 DEC
4pm American Studies seminar: Maria Lauret (Sussex), How to think and write about Michelle Obama. Arts A155.
4pm SEI seminar: Lyubka Savkova (Sussex), The nature of the European debate in Bulgaria. Arts A71.
4.15pm Anthropology seminar: Geert de Neve (Sussex), An Indian garment worker’s critique of CSR. Arts C233.

WED 2 DEC
5pm Migration seminar: Jose Mapril (Sussex), Flexible borders and (il)legality in Portugal. Arts C233.

THU 3 DEC
1pm Geography seminar: Hilary Crowe (Cambridge), The profitability of upland agriculture 1910–1947. Arts C175.

5pm Development lecture: Uma Lele, The nexus of food, agriculture, water and climate change. Chichester lecture theatre.

FRI 4 DEC
1pm Environmental History seminar: Catherine Conson (California/Sussex), The history and politics of forest policy and conservation in Madagascar. Arts A155.

Details of all events can also be found on the web at www.sussex.ac.uk/events

---

The fortnightly Bulletin is written and produced by Alison Field and James Healey. The next issue will be out on 4 Dec, with a copy deadline of 1pm on 27 Nov.

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.