Sussex appoints new Director of Student Recruitment

Marcus Williams is to join Sussex in a new post leading the University's student recruitment activities.

The role of Director of Student Recruitment brings, for the first time at Sussex, the responsibilities for all student marketing and recruitment together into one place.

Once he takes up the role in January 2010, Marcus will spearhead the University's marketing strategy and student recruitment operations for all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, in home, EU and overseas markets.

The appointment follows a major review of internationalisation at Sussex and the creation of a unified professional service for the 12 new schools.

Marcus will report to the new Registrar & Secretary, John Duffy, who was on the interview panel. John said: "The University has ambitious targets for growth in international and postgraduate students, and for sustaining and improving the quality of our home and EU undergraduate intake. Marcus will lead delivery against these challenging targets."

"He has strong operational experience of student recruitment, informed by professional marketing experience and a proven ability to support the strategic development of the University in our ambitious student recruitment and marketing goals."

Since 2003 Marcus Williams has been Deputy Director of Student Recruitment, heading up UK recruitment, at the University of Birmingham.

Before that he worked at the University of Warwick, including a five-year period when he was responsible for overseas recruitment from East Asia, Africa and the Middle East. He is also a graduate of the University of Warwick, where he studied not only for his BA and MA but also his MBA, which he completed in 2007.

Marcus said: "Sussex clearly has great ambitions going forward and it is this vision and dynamism – combined with the University's academic reputation and existing teaching and research strengths – that attracted me."

He will work closely with the newly appointed Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), Professor Chris Marlin, who has been recruited to lead the development and implementation of the University's internationalisation agenda.

Sussex is “the place to be” for third year running

Sussex is rated by its students as the “best place to be” in England, according to the latest international survey of the student experience.

The summer 2009 Student Barometer survey run by i-Graduate consisted of two surveys: one of international students, and another of 'home' UK students on taught postgraduate degrees and in their first year of undergraduate study or postgraduate research.

A massive 87% of UK students (as well as 80% of international students) said they would encourage people to apply to Sussex, and 46% would actively encourage people, up from 35% last year.

i-Graduate included detailed questions on satisfaction with ‘Learning’, ‘Living’ and ‘Support’.

Ninety per cent of UK students at Sussex said they were satisfied with their ‘Learning’, placing Sussex 4th of 22 institutions that participated in the UK version of this survey. The percentage for international students was slightly lower, at 85%, placing Sussex at seventh of the 12 institutions from the 1994 Group that took part. There were particularly high ratings for the Library and for language support.

On ‘Living’, the results for UK students were very similar to those for international students, with about 83% satisfied overall. Both UK and international students rated Sussex as the “best place to be” in England.

The highest Sussex scores in these three categories were for ‘Support’. A satisfaction rate of 91.3% among UK students placed Sussex ninth out of 22 participating institutions. The corresponding rate for international students was 87.5%, placing Sussex tenth in the 1994 Group.

In this category, other institutions have shown strong improvements year on year, as they look to ensure that students get the best support. Owen Richards, Academic Registrar, said: “At Sussex we need to continue to make improvements in our support to students if we are to succeed in a highly competitive environment.”

As well as positive scores, the surveys continued to highlight issues that need to be addressed – with all institutions facing high expectations from international students for support for employability and help with finding part-time work.

Owen Richards, Academic Registrar, said: "The information provided by these surveys is invaluable. We have seen positive improvements as a result of actions taken to strengthen Library services and customer service in the Finance office.

"Concerns about employability are precisely why steps to develop Sussex Plus and Postgrad Plus are a high priority for the University."

Sussex students are currently being surveyed as part of the autumn Student Barometer.

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Prof Joanne Wright to move to University of South Australia.
Reptiles and amphibians equally at risk of extinction

Crisis: Reptiles, such as this grass snake, are just as endangered as amphibians, but there has been far less research by scientists into their decline. Photo courtesy of Jules Howard/Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC).

The threat of extinction facing amphibians around the world may be just as severe for reptiles, say scientists from the University of Sussex and UK wildlife charity Amphibian and Reptile Conservation.

Writing in the journal Diversity, they argue that future research should be more equally balanced so that investment mirrors the risk to each group.

A report by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in 2004 revealed that one-third of all amphibian species worldwide were threatened with extinction.

A global reptile assessment is as yet incomplete but already research indicates that a similar risk of extinction may also be facing reptiles such as snakes, lizards, turtles and crocodiles.

"It is increasingly clear that amphibians are not alone in facing a major biodiversity crisis," says lead author Professor Trevor Beebee of the University of Sussex. "Other groups of 'cold-blooded' vertebrates, notably reptiles and freshwater fishes, are in the same boat."

The review also cites evidence that, even though both groups of species may be facing a similar threat of extinction, recent scientific research into the decline of amphibian numbers far outweighs research into the decline of reptiles.

In the new study, the authors searched scientific publications from 2005–09 under the theme of 'biodiversity and conservation', comparing the numbers that contained amphibian-related search terms (such as "frogs" or "toads") with those containing reptile-related search terms (such as "lizards" or "snakes").

The results showed that published scientific papers covering amphibian declines outnumbered papers covering reptile declines by four to one (153 papers to 42 respectively), even though there are substantially fewer species of amphibians than of reptiles in the world (6,347 and 8,734 species respectively).

Similar findings emerged when looking solely at published studies relating to native amphibians and reptiles in the UK. From 2005–09 there were 69 'biodiversity and conservation' papers on the seven native British amphibians, compared to just 20 papers on the six native terrestrial reptile species.

"Evidently there has been a significant bias towards study of declines in the amphibians," say the paper's authors. "The question arises as to whether the bias in favour of amphibian decline research is justified on the basis of risk."

Though amphibians and reptiles differ in their anatomy and life-histories, the causes of declines and extinctions are similar for both groups of species. They include habitat loss, invasive wildlife species and disease, pollution, climate change and the impact of roads. Disturbance and persecution (particularly of snakes) are an added cause of concern to reptiles.

To reduce the risk of extinction, the authors suggest that research should focus on the effects of habitat management and other methods of practical conservation.
Report helps schools to address deficits

The University took another step forward this week in the process that is under way to address its challenging financial position.

The Working Group set up in the summer by Senate published its report on the academic criteria that need to be considered by heads of school in developing their academic plans.

The criteria cover research quality, funding for research, high-quality degree programmes and the equipment and buildings required.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Layzell, chaired the group. He said: "The group has provided a full picture of the range of issues which need to be taken into account by heads of school. I believe this will support effective development and change at Sussex."

Academic change will involve some degree programmes being withdrawn as new programmes are developed. The Working Group reaffirmed that such decisions should be made by the head of school and the school’s Senior Management Team. The Group set out a process for programme withdrawal.

A full copy of the report is available at www.sussex.ac.uk/vc/finances

Considering the structure of the academic year

Following earlier discussions at Senate and at Teaching and Learning Committee, the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Group and the heads of schools have agreed that a paper outlining possible alternative structures for the academic year should go the School Teaching and Learning Committees in weeks 5 and 6 of this term.

The aim will be to look at whether such a change might bring benefits to the efficient and effective delivery of the curriculum — along with the spin-offs that might be expected for other activities, particularly research.

A clear case for benefits to the student experience would also be essential to justify any change.

No change will be agreed unless there is a strong case that the benefits outweigh any risks, but the Executive and the Heads of Schools believe that the issues involved should not be ignored and warrant further discussion.

The paper to go to schools will outline the pros and cons of changing the academic year to focus on two teaching periods, and how this might read across to curriculum structures and mid-year assessment.

The views of the school committees will be considered by the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee, with a report to Senate looking for a decision in principle at its week 10 meeting.

Any decision in principle to make a change would lead to a detailed implementation project for the 2011–12 year.

Alongside the consultation with academic units, focused through the committee structure, the University is keen to seek student views on the proposals and will be working closely this term with USSU, and with the student reps, to gauge student views, via a series of focus groups and through an online survey. There will also be scope for the newly elected student reps to report student views to their schools, and a paper reporting on student responses to the focus groups and online survey is planned for the week 10 Senate meeting.

Leading the way

Strong leadership and teamwork across the University will be key to a positive future for Sussex.

I know that we are seeing good team-working between all parts of the professional services, with central teams, strategy and operations managers and staff in the schools coming together to sort issues and find best ways of working. I believe that this cross-University working will prove to be one of the key benefits of change.

Just as our new students are getting used to life at Sussex, I am aware that we have many staff in new roles across the new schools, dealing with tasks and processes for the first time.

With such a degree of change in creating the new schools, this was inevitable. The fact that we have been able to provide a strong welcome and a positive start to the year for record numbers of students is testament the hard work of all staff. I want to record my thanks for all these efforts.

As our new heads of school, likewise, find their feet at Sussex they of course have a significant task ahead: the development of academic plans that will provide the growth and the cost savings needed for a secure and positive future.

The professional and trading services are likewise developing plans to ensure good value for money and effective support for the academic mission. And, helping to take this work forward, we will very soon be welcoming our new Registrar and Secretary, John Duffy, to head the professional services.

I know that John is keen to get to know colleagues at Sussex. He is already engaging with senior colleagues — and, when he formally arrives with us, he wants to get out and about across campus.

As Registrar, John will be part of my executive team. That team will soon also include a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) for the first time, with Professor Chris Marlin joining us in late November from Flinders University in Australia. This is a significant new role for Sussex, which signals the importance of looking internationally and of delivering our internationalisation strategy.

“It is through good teamwork and positive leadership that we will make progress.”

This third Pro-Vice-Chancellor role will also provide additional leadership support for Sussex, with each PVC working with heads of school across the arts, social sciences and sciences. And our executive meetings with heads of school collectively are already proving helpful — again part of the gains of the new system.

It is through good teamwork and positive leadership that we will make progress. In our new schools the senior management teams are shaping up, with directors and heads of department working with new heads of school.

We are strengthening leadership at Sussex with our leadership development programme, continuing across both academic and professional services.

We will also saying a sad farewell in the new year to Professor Joanne Wright who, in just three years as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), has been responsible for significant change and development at Sussex across the curriculum and the student experience.

I am keen that we are able to replace her with someone who will play an equally strong and dynamic role as the University develops for the future.

Finally, I hope that the open meetings with staff in November will provide an opportunity for looking forward together to the work that lies ahead.
News in brief ↓

VC's open staff forum

The Vice-Chancellor's open staff forum for the autumn term will take place on Monday 2 November at 2pm, and on Tuesday 3 November at 10am, both in the Terrace Room, Bramber House. All staff are welcome.

Homestay host families required

Would you like to earn some extra money and do something worthwhile just before Christmas? A group of Spanish teachers are visiting the Sussex Language Institute (S LI) for three weeks from 22 November - 11 December and need to be housed in Brighton/Hove. You receive £105 per teacher per week for bed, breakfast and evening meal. If you have a spare room or two, contact Melanie Suppel, Accommodation and Welfare Officer in S LI, ext 8338 or m.a.suppel@sussex.ac.uk.

Sussex Writing Series

The School of English and the Centre for Community Engagement (CCE) have launched a new seminar series on critical and creative writing. Visiting speakers confirmed for the autumn term include writer and image-maker Graham Rawle, award-winning short-story writer Vanessa Gebbie and T. S. Eliot prize-winning poet George Szirtes. The series kicks off with Jane Rusbridge from Chichester University reading from her new novel 'The Devil's Music' on Tuesday (27 October) at 5pm in Arts B217. For further information contact Abi Curtis and Bethan Stevens at writingseries@sussex.ac.uk.

Win a night at Shelleys Hotel

The latest in the University's series of hotel competitions gives you the opportunity to win an overnight stay (for two people sharing a double room) and full English breakfast at Shelleys Hotel in Lewes. To enter, just answer this question: what is the name of the Shelleys Hotel restaurant? The answer is in the list of University-approved hotels and guest houses, available online at www.sussex.ac.uk/aboutus/findus/wheretostay Send your answer by 10 December with your name, status (e.g. member of staff/students/alumnus) and contact details to hotelcompetition@sussex.ac.uk.

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

Bee-friendly plant sales to help fund research

In a bid to help the endangered honey bee, the Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects (LASI) has joined forces with a firm that sells garden plants.

Nick Mann of Habitat Aid has produced a range of plant collections to appeal to gardeners and bee allies and will be donating half the proceeds from tree-collection sales to the Sussex Plan for Honey Bee Health and Well-Being, the five-year research programme currently under way at LASI.

Dr Karin Altoun, one of the scientists at LASI says: "The importance of what gardeners and landowners can do to help honey bees cannot be underestimated. 'Many gardeners do not want to limit their plant and tree choice to native species, so this collection provides an alternative list of exotic and beautiful trees. They also have the added bonus that they produce flowers in spring or late summer, when food for bees is often scarce.'" Nick Mann says: 'I'm delighted that Habitat Aid is able to support LASI. This is an important cause, and as a beekeeper myself, it is one particularly close to my heart.'

Since October 2008, LASI researchers have been researching alongside fundamental insect biology - improved beekeeping practices, honey bee diseases, breeding and conservation.

Chinese minister visits Sussex

The Education Minister at the Chinese Embassy visited Sussex on 8 October to meet staff who have research and teaching collaborations with China.

During the visit Mr Tian Xiaogang, the Minister Counsellor at the Chinese Embassy's Education Section in London, received briefings from:
- Dr Jing Gu about IDS' research programmes on China,
- Dr Naomi Tamoor about the faculty exchange and student visiting programme with Peking and Nanjing Universities,
- Dr Wun Watson about SRU's work with Chinese institutions on energy strategy.

Mr Tian, who was accompanied by Mr Qi Pinwei, First Secretary at the Education Section, also received an introduction to the work of the Biomedical Engineering Group from Dr Wei Wang; visited the Bartow Gallery of Chinese art in the Library; and met the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing.

Mr Tian was pleased to hear that Sussex is strengthening its links and exploring student exchanges with leading Chinese institutions, and will be offering joint scholarships with the China Scholarships Council.

He was also particularly interested to learn about the rise in the number of Chinese students at Sussex and how they perform during their studies.

Top human rights judge delivers first memorial lecture

Sir Christopher Greenwood, Britain's judge at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and a veteran of landmark human rights legal cases, delivered the inaugural Professor Colonel Gerald Draper OBE Memorial Lecture, organised by the University of Sussex.

The lecture, established in memory of the distinguished former Sussex law academic and Nuremberg prosecutor, was hosted by Sussex alumnus Tony Bally at Portcullis House at Westminster on Thursday (22 October).

Professor Colonel Draper was one of the first Allied officers to arrive at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp at the end of the Second World War, an experience that affected him profoundly. He went on to serve as prosecutor at Nuremberg as well as at various War Crimes Trials between 1945 and 1949.

On retirement from military life in 1956 he turned to academia and in 1967 became Reader in Law at Sussex, where he embarked on a wide-ranging and distinguished career in the field of humanitarian law and the law of armed conflict. He was promoted to a chair at Sussex in 1976 and retired in 1979, when he was made Professor Emeritus. He died in 1989.

Sir Christopher's lecture explored the development of the relationship between humanitarian law and human rights law and what future direction it might take.

Friends and law alumni of the University were joined by senior representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office, the Immigration Advisory Service and the United Nations Association of the UK.
Endersby on Darwin

Dr Jim Endersby, a specialist in the history of science and the editor of a special 150th-anniversary edition of On the Origin of Species, has spent the past year giving lectures around the world to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin. He concludes his tour in November with talks at the University of Plymouth and the University of Pennsylvania.

I've been trying to debunk some of the myths around Darwin, which have become ever more prominent because Darwin has been in the news so much this year.

For example, it's still regularly claimed that Darwin was an enemy of religion, or that the Origin somehow 'disproves' Christianity.

In reality, Darwin was careful to keep his religious beliefs private, while in public statements such as the Origin he went out of his way to write in a way that allowed people to believe what they wished.

Reactions were more varied and complicated than today's "God or Darwin" arguments might lead us to expect.

We probably know more about him now, thanks to the publication of his letters, diaries and notebooks, than even his wife knew when he was alive.

Knowing so much about his life makes him more human and engaging for contemporary audiences, which is important, but as a result of all the attention Darwin now casts rather a deep shadow over the 19th century. At times, it seems as if he were the only scientist of the time.

It's a little ironic that I have helped deepen this shadow, this year in particular, because my main interest is in Joseph Hooker, one of 19th-century Britain's greatest botanists, but a figure who is only ever mentioned because he was one of Darwin's closest friends.

I am a consultant for a BBC television series next year about the history of science and what we hope to get people to understand is the vital connection between history and science.

Darwin's story is only one of many in the history of science; the others may be less-well-known but they're equally fascinating. Personally, I'm looking forward to a break from Darwin and the chance to tell some of those other stories.

I hope that this year will inspire more people to actually read On the Origin of Species rather than base their opinions on what they imagine it says. It is a wonderful piece of writing.

The best result of all would be if the Darwin year encouraged more people to think of the history of science not as a slightly obscure specialisation, but as a central part of all of history.

Darwin and the Underground

Sussex geneticist Dr Robert Whittle has written and published online an 8,000-word poem to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin.

Robert, who researched and taught on the developmental biology of animals, has clearly been busy since he retired as Reader in Genetics in 2004.

Darwin and the Underground is an account of the imagined return in 2009 of Darwin to London, where he becomes embroiled in a public debate about artificial or synthetic cells.

Robert says: "This is my own idiosyncratic way of celebrating the stature and achievements of Charles Darwin, attempting to take his ideas from science into another context.

"My poem also has a sub-plot about the Underground and is humorous in parts."

See www.darwinunderground.co.uk

A new drama inspired by the words of Sir Isaac Newton and drawing on a major research project at Sussex was premiered this week.

Let Newton Be! brings the complex and controversial character of science to life. The script is taken entirely from the written words of Newton and his contemporaries - letters, notes, published and unpublished works.

Its first performance by Menagerie Theatre Company at Trinity College, Cambridge, on Tuesday (20 October), was followed by a discussion led by history of science Professor Rob Iliffe, who is head of the Newton Project at Sussex.

"Newton is, arguably, the greatest scientist of all time," says Rob, who acted as consultant for playwright Craig Baxter. "He was a physicist, mathematician, astronomer, natural philosopher, alchemist and theologian."

The Newton Project involves bringing together all of Newton's writings - some seven million words in total - and making them available online for anyone to read.

"It is a major undertaking," says Rob. "We are currently only about half-way through transcribing the manuscripts. What we are aiming to show is the complexity of Newton's scientific work and his religious writings, and finding the connections between them."

Let Newton Be!, which presents Newton throughout different periods of his life - from curious young scientist, to isolated Cambridge scholar to autocratic head of the Royal Society - was commissioned by the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion to celebrate the Year of Astronomy and the 800th anniversary of Cambridge University.

The play was performed to four audiences at Cambridge University, with plans for a UK and US tour in 2010.
PVC (Education) heads down under

Advertisements will go live online next week for a new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) to replace Professor Joanne Wright, who has been appointed as Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic at the University of South Australia.

Sussex is moving swiftly to appoint Professor Wright’s successor; the advertisement will appear in the THE on Thursday (29 October), with a closing date for applications in mid to late November and interviews scheduled for December.

Professor Wright came to Sussex in 2006 from Royal Holloway, University of London.

In her present role she has University-wide responsibility for teaching and learning strategies, student recruitment (including international recruitment), the student experience, quality assurance and academic standards. She also has line-management responsibility for some of the heads of school and is a member of the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Group.

"Joanne has made a tremendous difference to Sussex over the three years she has been here. I know that all colleagues will join me in wishing Joanne all the best for her new role in Adelaide."

"Her leadership – in creating a new teaching and learning strategy for Sussex, in driving forward significant curriculum development that is already bearing fruit, and in the major improvements already made and planned in the Sussex student experience – has been outstanding."

He highlighted her role in the development of new degrees in business and management and in the introduction of Sussex Plus (an opportunity for undergraduates to develop and demonstrate their skills to employers and course providers).

Professor Wright said: "I am pleased to have been able to make a serious contribution to Sussex in my time here."

"Seeing major new programmes starting to flourish, seeing our NSS scores making real and sustained improvements year on year and, last night, seeing us competing in the national THE awards for 'most improved student experience' have been significant highlights."

"I am delighted to have had the opportunity to work with all colleagues at Sussex and I wish everyone here the very best for the future."

The new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International), Professor Chris Martin, starts work at Sussex in late November. Pending the appointment of a replacement as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), he will be covering Professor Wright’s line-management responsibilities (for heads of school in the social sciences) after she leaves at the end of January 2010 to take up her new position.

FIRST CLASS

A Sussex student currently studying in Hong Kong has won a £2,000 British Council scholarship. Anthony Elliott is spending the first term of his third year on the BA in International Relations and Anthropology at City University. In his application to the British Council, Anthony proposed an art project, which also extends into social sciences, about what Hong Kong artists think of the UK. An exhibition of the work will be held in London in summer 2010. The International & Study Abroad Office sends about five students a year to Hong Kong.

Sussex employee and graduate Justine Kilkerr has been "grinning like a fool" as Jonathan Cape prepares to publish her debut novel. Justine, now a Data Manager in the Psychosocial Oncology Group, studied English Literature with African & Asian Studies at Sussex and then took the two-year Certificate in Creative Writing. Advice for Strays – "a novel about love, loss and a very unusual friendship" with a "strange, slightly menacing but humorous atmosphere" – is due out in April 2010. Justine is currently working on her second novel.

Get help with your publications

The publications and branding web pages (www.sussex.ac.uk/publications) have been updated to include extensive information for Sussex staff who are planning brochures, leaflets, web pages, etc.

The pages include a comprehensive publishing checklist to take you from the initial planning stage right through to delivery of a publication.

There are branded blank templates for items such as brochure covers and flyers.

You will also find
• the list of approved external designers,
• a useful briefing template,
• and everything you need to know about the Sussex brand and visual identity, including logos, colours and a writing and style guide.

The pages should be your first point of call if you have any queries about publications or branding; if you don’t find the information you’re looking for, you can contact the team directly as they will be happy to help.

Time to join Sussexsport

Regular users of campus sports services – especially those new to Sussex and others who were not on campus during the summer – are being reminded to sign up to a new membership scheme to get the best value for their money.

So far, nearly 1,700 students and staff have signed up for one of the new memberships since they were introduced on 1 August.

Sussexsport now offers three types of memberships (bronze, silver and gold), costing between £25 and £185 a year for staff, which allow different levels of access to facilities and programmes.

For a list of all full and discounted prices and more information about memberships (including rates for students, alumni and members of the public), go to www.sussex.ac.uk/sport
Event planning and parking problems

The construction of new buildings on sites which, until recently, were car parks has made the ongoing parking problem at the University worse than ever.

If that wasn’t bad enough, one day during the first week of term the Sussex House car park was closed to accommodate the attendees at a memorial service! The service was held in the afternoon and the car park was closed all day.

Is it not possible to arrange such events as these at weekends or during vacations and so avoid inconveniencing staff and students alike?

Surely when remembering those who are no longer with us it would be better to reflect on the space they sadly left behind rather than on spaces they’ve taken!

Phil Meek, Mathematical and Physical Sciences

New campus clamp-down on illegal parking

The Transport and Security teams are repeating a successful campaign to target illegal parking on campus.

They joined forces in June to clamp down on the minority of drivers and cyclist who choose to ignore the University’s traffic and parking regulations for motor vehicle and bicycles.

Some drivers park on double-yellow lines or in hatched areas, while others try to avoid payment. Some cyclists lock their bikes to railings or take them inside buildings.

Extra enforcement is again being applied to locations across campus, for an initial four-week period that started on Monday (19 October). Enforcement officers have the权力 to issue £60 fixed-penalty notices to owners of illegally parked vehicles.

“We’re doing this in fairness to the majority of staff, students and visitors who park legally,” says the Transport Manager, Chris Wadey.

The start date was chosen to allow new students and staff time to obtain the permit or pass required to park a car on campus.

“The pressure on parking spaces could be eased if those who travel to campus by car used public transport,” adds Chris. “I would encourage all drivers to consider if this is possible.”

Chris Wadey, Transport Manager, replies:

I do understand Phil’s frustration now that parking on campus has returned to its term-time congestion.

The construction of the Friston building on what was mainly an overspill area of the Science car park has resulted in a small reduction in the number of spaces – and the construction planned over the next few years will continue to place pressure on parking.

However, I feel sure the majority of the campus community will consider the inconvenience caused by a very small number of weekday memorial services to be a minor sacrifice for acknowledging what a past colleague has contributed to the University.

I encourage all those who can to travel by bus, train or bicycle or on foot, freeing up parking places for those who do not have public-transport links.

A walk on the wild side

Welcome to our first column of the new academic year.

Staff member Paul Cecil has sent us a photo of some greyish coloured webs suspended among the twigs of the hawthorn hedges around the North Field.

These webs can sometimes be seen in huge numbers festooning shrubs such as hawthorn and blackthorn, as sometimes happens along the Brighton by-pass.

They are the larval nests of the Brown-tail, a not particularly exciting-looking moth with white wings and, as its name suggests, a tuft of brown hairs along the tip of the abdomen.

Brown-tails lay their eggs in large batches on twigs in July. The caterpillars hatch simultaneously and immediately start to spin their silken nest in which they feed colonially for the rest of the summer. Come the autumn they spin a stronger web in which they pass the winter and it’s these winter webs that are particularly conspicuous. The caterpillars, which can be a serious pest, start feeding again in April before pupating.

If the moth is a bit drab, the reddish-brown mature caterpillars (right) are really quite attractive with red and white spots and tufts of long reddish hairs. So here’s the health warning! The caterpillars should never be handled as the hairs are extremely irritating and can cause a serious rash or an asthmatic attack.

The species has a rather coastal distribution running from Yorkshire to Cornwall, with a concentration around the Thames estuary. On sand dunes the caterpillars often feed on Sea Buckthorn, as in our photo.

The Brown-tails that survive to emerge as adult moths next summer will need to beware the campus ‘flindernice’; this delightful Sussex term for bats is presumably a corruption of the more widespread name ‘fluttermouse’.

Dr David Hill has been continuing his surveys of campus bats. Shortly before induction week, he investigated the woodland strip between the Eastern Ring Road and the playing fields. He found no fewer than five bat species in that small part of Tenantsin Belt.

As expected the most numerous were Common Pipistrelles and Brown Long-Eared Bats. The former emerge around sunset and are the agile little bats with erratic flight most frequently seen by casual observers around campus. On the other hand, Brown Long-Eared Bats are rarely seen, being strictly nocturnal and emitting echolocating calls that are very faint even for enthusiasts armed with a bat detector capable of making the ultrasonic frequencies audible. With ears nearly as long as their body, these were presumably the ‘homed bats’ or ‘Devil bats’ of Victorian shepherds on the downs, appearing to be veritable ‘bats out of hell’.

Of particular interest to us were two Natterer’s Bats, a species with pale fur and rather pinkish face and limbs, hence its old Sussex names of ‘red-grey bat’ and ‘red-armed bat’.

For some earlier columns, see www.sussex.ac.uk/walkonthewildside
Email david@sussex.ac.uk to report your sightings or ask questions.
Academic events

MON 26 OCT
5pm Education seminar: Jocelyne Quinn, Subjects and subjectivities in higher education. Arts D110.

TUE 27 OCT
4pm SEI seminar: John Wood (Imperial), A strategic vision for the European Research Area towards 2030. Arts A71.

4.15pm Anthropology seminar: James Carrier (Oxford Brookes), Putting ethical consumption in its place. Arts C233.

5pm English seminar: Jane Rusbridge (Chichester), Writing 'The Devil's Music'. Arts B217.

6pm Religion seminar: Paul Oestreicher (Sussex), The pacifist and warrior traditions in the three Abrahamic faiths. Meeting House, Quiet Room.

THU 29 OCT
6.30pm History lecture: Peter Burke (Cambridge), The rise and fall of the polymath, 1600–2000. BSMS lecture theatre. RSVP essential to events@sussex.ac.uk

FRI 30 OCT
4pm Russian Studies seminar: Susan Richards (openDemocracy), Lost and found in Russia. Arts A155.

WED 28 OCT
5pm Migration seminar: Alexander Betts (Oxford), Survival migration. Arts C233.

TUE 3 NOV
4pm SEI seminar: Marko Attila-Hoare (Kingston), How far are the Balkans from normalisation? Arts A71.

4.15pm Anthropology seminar: David Philips (Newcastle), Unmasking fair trade production communities in Malawi. Arts C233.

6.30pm Professional lecture: Gillian Bendelow (Sussex), The mind/body problem in health and illness. BSMS lecture theatre. RSVP essential to events@sussex.ac.uk

WED 4 NOV
4pm Art History seminar: Gerdie Needham (Vereins Academy of Arts), Can a painting move a church wall? Silverstone (previously EDB) 121.

THU 5 NOV
1pm Geography seminar: Martin Todd (Sussex), title tbc. Arts C175.