Sussex scores highly again in student-satisfaction poll

Students have given their seal of approval to studying at Sussex in the National Student Survey (NSS) for 2009, pushing Sussex up the rankings for the second year running.

The overall average score for Sussex rose from 75.09 per cent (2008) to 77.18 per cent – while the trend across the rest of the higher and further education sectors was for an unchanged score of 75 per cent.

The new scores place Sussex in the top 20 (19th place) for student satisfaction among the elite universities of the Russell Group (which includes Oxford and Cambridge) and 1994 Group (including Durham and York).

According to the NSS results, 86 per cent of Sussex students expressed satisfaction with their learning experience. Sussex also performed particularly well in teaching.

The University showed strong improvement in its scores for library services (up nine per cent), offering detailed comments on work (up seven per cent), and helpful feedback to students (up six per cent). These are areas that the University has prioritised in light of previous results, for example with 24-hour library opening.

This year’s NSS results do not include scores for the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS), which Sussex runs jointly with the University of Brighton, and which did extremely well. The medical school scored 84.3% for overall student satisfaction, up from 75.4% in 2008 – putting it second overall for Medicine.

Subject areas at Sussex that did notably well included Social Work (rated number one in the country), Philosophy (top in the Russell and 1994 Groups and third overall), Biochemistry (fourth overall), Psychology (fourth in the Russell and 1994 Groups and 15th out of 109 overall), Computer Science (19th out of 127 overall) and Law (20th out of 95 overall).

In 2008, the University recorded one of the biggest improvements of all universities, and the best of all institutions in the elite 1994 and Russell Groups, in the NSS results.

The NSS asks final year undergraduates 22 questions across a range of measures: teaching, academic support, assessment and feedback, learning resources, organisation, personal development and overall satisfaction.

All categories of question show overall improvement for Sussex, though there is scope for improvement in IT access and provision of specialist equipment.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, said: “The University continues to build on the success of last year’s results.

“I am especially pleased that we have shown improvements in assessment and feedback and academic support, where we have been targeting particular efforts.

“We expect to see further improvement as new teaching and accommodation buildings come on line and with the introduction of our new schools this autumn, offering the courses our students have requested.”

Full results are available at www.herts.ac.uk/learning/nss/data/2009/

Luminaries light the way for graduates on career path

Leading figures from industry, politics, commerce, the media and the public sector will be giving the benefit of their experience to Sussex postgraduates as part of a new scheme to boost student career prospects.

The scheme, PostgradPlus, will include masterclasses from:

- Hilary Benn MP Secretary of State at DEFRA;
- Helen Boaden, Director of BBC News;
- Professor Adrian Bird FRS, Director of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell Biology;
- Gail Rebeck, Chairman and CEO of Random House Group;
- Richard Wilson QC;
- Julian Bellamy, Head of Programmes at Channel 4;
- Geoffrey Dennis, Chief Executive of CARE International;
- Jamie Shear, Director of Policy Programmes for NATO.

The masterclasses will provide insider knowledge about what employers are looking for and offer 21st-century career-management skills for careers in business and finance, education, entrepreneurship, international development, law, media, the public sector (including politics) and science and engineering.

“Many students fail to recognise just how skilful and knowledgeable they are.”

PostgradPlus will also offer employability skills workshops – a series of one-day sessions focusing on the skills and attitudes sought by employers: leadership, teamwork, confidence, effective presentation, problem-solving and commercial awareness.

PostgradPlus is open to those studying for Masters degrees at Sussex. It complements another new scheme, Sussex Plus, aimed at broadening the university experience and showcasing Sussex undergraduates’ skills and achievements in an attractive ‘webfolio’. It will be piloted during 2009–10.

Linda Buckham, head of the Career Development and Employment Centre (CDEC), says: “Many students fail to recognise just how skilful and knowledgeable they are across all aspects of their lives and what they can offer employers (or further training providers). In the current jobs market it is important to know about career improvisation.

“PostgradPlus and Sussex Plus will help our students to stand out from the crowd. We need to get them thinking about the bigger picture, and about what makes them unique.”
Risks of geoengineering for climate change

A University of Sussex expert on energy policy and climate change has joined with other leading academics to recommend that more research is needed on new technologies to tackle climate change.

Professor Gordon Mackerron is a member of the Royal Society’s geoengineering group, whose report, released on 1 September, also warns that some of these technologies could pose a further threat to viable life on Earth.

The report, ‘Geoengineering the climate: Science, governance and uncertainty’, found that geoengineering technologies – split into Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) and Solar Radiation Management (SRM) – could be technically possible and even potentially useful in avoiding excessive heating of the planet. However, the group identified major uncertainties regarding their effectiveness, costs and environmental impacts.

CDR techniques address the root of the problem – rising CO2 – and so have fewer uncertainties and risks, as they work to return the Earth to a more normal state. Techniques include carbon dioxide capture (the preferred method), enhanced weathering, which utilises naturally occurring reactions of CO2 from the air with rocks and minerals, creation of forests and ocean fertilisation.

SRM techniques act by reflecting the sun’s energy away from Earth, meaning they lower temperatures rapidly, but do not affect the root of the problem – CO2 levels. Other techniques include high-tech reflectors in space and stratospheric aerosols to mimic the screening effect of volcana fall-out.

None of the techniques, however, have been proven to be effective at an affordable cost, with acceptable environmental impacts, and they work to reduce temperatures only over very long timescales.

Gordon says: “Progress in cutting greenhouse gas emissions has, in the UK and internationally, been disappointing. Unless we can much improve on this record globally, we will have to consider seriously some radical alternatives to avoid excessive planetary heating, for example geoengineering technologies.”

“At present we know far too little about their potential for unintended but major ecological damage. The right response is to conduct research into the most promising technologies, but to be fully aware of the potential harmful side effects and to put in place decision-making processes to ensure that we do not get locked into damaging technologies.”

New technology helps autistic children play together

Carefully designed technology helped autistic children to reveal social skills that otherwise could have remained hidden.

This was one of the findings of DPhil student Samantha Holt, from the University of Sussex ChaLab, who presented her research at the annual conference of the British Psychological Society’s division of developmental psychology on Wednesday (9 September).

Showing and pointing (often referred to as “joint attention” behaviours) typically emerge in children from about nine months of age.

Deficits in these behaviours are often the earliest signs of autism. Autistic children find playing together very difficult because it requires each child to be aware of what the other is attending to and wanting to do – things that require joint attention.

Samantha’s research involved four autistic boys aged 5–7 from the autism unit of a special school, who played a picture-sorting game in pairs. The children played one game with a standard computer set-up and one game using new computer software.

The new software (called Separate Control of Shared Space - SCoSS, and developed at Sussex on the EPSRC-funded ‘Riddles’ and ‘ShareIT’ projects) displayed both children’s games at the same time and encouraged the children to take account of what their partner was doing, so that they could play the game together.

The results showed that the SCoSS software supported the autistic children so that they were able to show more active awareness of their partner, through joint attention behaviours that were not displayed using a more typical set-up.

The results demonstrated that, without this support, the same child could appear to have limited awareness of their partner and to be unable to play the game.

Samantha said: “I was very excited to see that the autistic children were able to work together with the support of the SCoSS technology. My hope is that future research can investigate if such computer support can help the children to develop their social skills.”

Kyrgyz law reformers visit campus

A criminal justice expert at Sussex is helping Kyrgyzstan draw up a new criminal procedural code, and hosted a reform committee from the central Asian country on campus last month.

Dr Richard Vogler, Senior Lecturer in Law, was host to a visit by the Kyrgyz government’s Drafting Group who are working on a new code for the country which is more rights respecting and compliant with international standards.

Kyrgyzstan has been repeatedly criticised for human rights violations and its system of criminal justice retains some significant features from the Soviet era.

Earlier this year Richard visited the capital, Bishkek, on behalf of a US government-funded Commission of Inquiry into Kyrgyz compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Bringing the reform committee back to Sussex has enabled him to introduce them to British criminal justice practices first hand and to facilitate their work on drafting the new code in a neutral environment.

Richard, who has worked extensively on criminal justice reform in eastern Europe and Eurasia, is very optimistic about the chances for significant progress in securing rights protection for arrested persons in Kyrgyzstan. He said: “The visit had a tremendous impact.

“Hearing about jury trials and adversarial due process in theory is very different from witnessing them in practice.”
Sussex prepares for swine flu

As preparations for the autumn term gather apace, key staff have been looking specifically at arrangements for dealing with the possible effects of swine flu on the running of the campus.

The government is forecasting that up to 30% of the population could get swine flu between now and May 2010 and that, at the peak of the outbreak, up to 8% could be affected at one time, with absences from workplaces because of illness being in the region of 12%. In addition, people may also be absent caring for family members who are unwell.

The Director of Health and Safety, Stuart Harley, is the University’s liaison with the regional health planning teams.

He says: “Fortunately, with the impact being mild for most people, the emphasis is on making sure the campus can continue to run safely and offer its normal range of services with potentially reduced staffing levels, and ensuring that students have a safe, secure and supportive environment, as well as assistance if they are unwell.

“We shall continue to liaise with colleagues in the Primary Care Trust to ensure the University’s planning and response activities remain up to date and proportional, and are based on current medical and contingency-planning advice.”

Professional Services units have been planning for how they would cope with potential staff absences, and in particular making sure that key support services such as safety and security teams and IT Services can continue to operate effectively.

Guidance is also being issued to schools to ensure they are planning for how they continue to deliver teaching and learning and can continue to support research activities.

A helpline for students will be established so all students can report their absence and so that the University can ensure that students in residences are getting the support they need.

Staff and students are reminded to read and follow the national advice on swine flu, which is available online – together with up-to-date information from the University – via www.sussex.ac.uk/hsa/swineflu

Staff suggest savings

A suggestions scheme launched in July has already received over 100 ideas from staff as to how the University could generate additional income or find new sources of sustainable savings.

A group of senior managers and colleagues from the trades unions will look at ideas coming in each month via www.sussex.ac.uk/suggestionscheme and share the best of them with relevant schools and units, or look to get them adopted by the University as a whole.

The group meets for the first time next week and will provide regular reports on ideas coming forward.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Layzell, is chairing the group. He has said: “This is an idea suggested by trades union colleagues and it is just one part of the range of action that the University has in hand to address extremely challenging financial circumstances.

“Engaging colleagues in this way is an important part of finding ideas that can deliver savings year on year. We’re keen to have more, so please keep them coming.”

So far the ideas range from new types of courses and services (to generate income) through changes to pay and staffing arrangements and print costs (to make savings).

Navigating the way ahead

Welcome back, and welcome for the first time to new staff. I know for many the summer will have been a busy time at Sussex.

As well as conference and vacation work, summer schools, research activity and vital admissions activity, the creation of the new schools has meant more than the normal preparation taking place over the summer months.

I am conscious that moving 450 staff on campus has not been undistruptive. I am visiting all school offices over the next two weeks, to meet Professional Services staff and see for myself progress on the ground.

With the creation of the new schools and existing staff moving into new roles, come new staff, most notably across many of our new schools. Also, as we offer thanks to our current Registrar & Secretary Dr Phil Harvey and wish him well at Sheffield, we look forward to welcoming John Duffy as his successor and Professor Chris Marlin as our new Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International).

I am pleased that the new senior management group – the new heads of school, meeting with my executive team – has already started to operate, closely connecting the executive and the schools’ academic leadership at Sussex. Being able to bring this group of senior managers together across Sussex was always one of the expected organisational gains of the new system.

We were able to reflect on a number of key areas of activity for the University, using the goals set out in our strategic plan as the guiding star for our thinking. We will be continuing to update the plan and keep it refreshed and up to date as the year progresses. But these challenging goals to improve performance across research, teaching and business remain central.

We have of course seen new data and information on which to reflect. The National Student Survey results for 2009 – as reported online in August and again in this, the first Bulletin since they were published – are a positive step forward.

We have been able to build on the significant 2008 improvements and have now reached the median of the 1994 and Russell Groups.

There is still a way to go until we reach the upper quartile we set as the target, but this progress since we languished one place off the bottom is real evidence of how focussing our attention on where improvements are needed can produce results. New initiatives such as Sussex Plus will be important for addressing areas such as personal development, where improvement is badly needed.

We have also seen results with forecast admissions for this autumn – where we look to achieve expanded undergraduate numbers. I am pleased that we have been able to take advantage of the additional places opened up to us by government – albeit on a fees-only basis. Previously the University has not always seized the available opportunities for growth.

Our international numbers look to have grown – slightly at undergraduate and potentially more significantly at postgraduate level – but again not as far as we need for longer term development and health. This is fresh evidence of why Chris Marlin’s appointment, and a new appointment that is being made to strengthen and lead our Professional Services recruitment team, remain the right steps to take.

And our financial performance – reflecting our academic performance and the wider financial climate and funding regimes – is of course central to our concerns. The pressures on finances are as real as before, and this term will be critical for developing the ideas that will inform the long-term plans for our schools.

The staff suggestions scheme has generated positive ideas and I want to encourage colleagues to continue to offer their thoughts. The reality of what we need to do more widely will be based on the ideas being considered by heads of school and by the leaders of the range of Professional Services and our campus trading services.

I have no doubt that the way ahead will require tough decisions to be made in due course. But we will continue to approach this in a calm and considered manner. We will consult on proposals when they are in a position to be published, and then move ahead to take the decisions that help the University achieve its strategic goals.
University appoints Director of Attenborough Centre

The University of Sussex has appointed Sally Jane Norman as the first director of the new Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts on campus.

The Centre, formerly known as the Gardner Arts Centre, is set to re-open in time for the University’s 50th anniversary celebrations in 2011. A £4 million refurbishment will provide a flexible auditorium with a mixture of up to three stages and up to 500 seats; an exhibition gallery; a cafe; and several studios.

Ms Norman will develop specific dates for a formal opening and the building could be in use again during the 2010–11 academic year.

She will also develop and manage the Centre’s facilities for research projects, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

In addition, Ms Norman will work to develop innovative, creative and entrepreneurial engagements with professional arts organisations outside the University.

Ms Norman is a theatre and art historian interested in performing arts and technology, scenography and theatre architectures.

She is currently director of Newcastle University’s Culture Lab, which provides an environment for academics and practitioners working beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and promotes synergies between artists, cultural and scientific institutions and the creative industries.

Ms Norman has previously led research activities at institutions including the International Institute of Puppetry (Charleville-Mézières), Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (Karlsruhe), IRCAM (Paris) and the Studio for Electro-Instrumental Music (Amsterdam).

Theatre and art historian: Sally Jane Norman, just appointed as the first Director of the new Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, will lead a £4 million refurbishment of the creative space in time for the University’s 50th anniversary celebrations in 2011.

Prior to her Newcastle appointment, she was Director-General of the École européenne supérieure de l’Image in France, where she created a pioneering practice-led PhD programme in Digital Arts.

Welcoming Ms Norman’s appointment, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, said: “This role will be key in developing the University’s creative arts strategy.”

Ms Norman said: “Sussex is the ideal place to develop this unique project: in addition to Sussex’s reputation for innovative interdisciplinary teaching and research, the Attenborough name stands for passionate commitment to education and the arts.

“Founding the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts thus represents an exciting opportunity and challenge, with much to live up to.”

Sussex team’s starter for ten ...

A team from Sussex faced their starter for ten in the current series of ‘University Challenge’.

Edmund Kirby (English Literature), Emily Benardout (Psychology), Nicholas Neasom (English Language) and Tom Anderson (History) were seen pitting their wits against Newnham College, Cambridge, in the first round, broadcast on BBC2 in August.

Despite eventually losing 120 points to 260, team captain Edmund was upbeat. He said: “We had some good brains on our side and were pitched against a very strong team. We weren’t disappointed with our score.

“We had a really good time in Manchester for the filming. There is much more camaraderie between the teams than you would imagine.”

In 2006 a team made it to the televised rounds, but unfortunately lost to Girton College, Cambridge, with a score of 140 points to 190.

In 2003 Dave Boyne, Ross Levin, Andrew Clay and Jon Watson were knocked out in the second round to Magdalen College, Oxford.

Sussex won ‘University Challenge’ in 1968 and the team reunited to do battle against Imperial College for a 40th edition of the programme in 2003.
Busy summer for undergraduate researchers

An exhibition on campus will mark the conclusion of research undertaken by promoting Sussex undergraduates benefiting from a University-funded bursary scheme this summer, with support from generous alumni donations.

Following a highly successful competition in the spring term that attracted almost 90 applications, 31 undergraduates were awarded Junior Research Associate (JRA) bursaries of up to £2,200 each to carry out exciting and original research.

The bursaries, equivalent to £225 per week, supported undergraduates while they undertook research on campus alongside world-leading academics during the summer vacation.

A poster exhibition in the InQbate Creativity Zone (in Pevensey 3), open to everyone, will display the outcomes of the research.

Among the students presenting their research at the exhibition are:
- Amanda Kuepfer (above), who has been working with Professor Francis Ratnieks, the UK’s only professor of apiculture, to better understand landscapes that encourage honey bees; and
- Nick Skidmore, who has been using the unique Kipling collection at Sussex to research the impact of the Great War on the author’s literature.

The aim of the JRA scheme is to encourage talented and ambitious Sussex undergraduates to consider postgraduate study at Sussex and a career in research following graduation.

This is the second year that the JRA scheme has been run and builds on the great success of last year’s programme, which has already resulted in a number of JRA’s contributing to research papers and applying for postgraduate study at Sussex.

The JRA exhibition will be held on Thursday 24 September, 4.30–6pm. If you would like to attend, please RSVP to James Bluring at jra@sussex.ac.uk by Friday 18 September.

Three Sussex graduates shortlisted for Student of the Year Award

Two new graduates from the Department of Physics & Astronomy have made the shortlist of just three for the 2009 Science, Engineering & Technology Student (SET) of the Year Awards, in the Best Physics Student category.

Heather Campbell applied with her project on the search for and potential discovery of new Isolated Neutron Stars (INS), one of the rarest types of stars in the galaxy. More than 1,000 billion stars, so far only seven INS have been found. After examining a massive 6,860 objects, Heather has found 11 new very strong INS candidates.

Heather said: “I have thoroughly enjoyed my project, and the different tasks involved meant that each day was interesting. I also loved the opportunity to attend conferences and meet others in the field. The highlight of my degree was observing in Arizona, a chance not many undergraduates get!”

Debbie Hill’s project was part of the neutron electric dipole moment (nEDM) experiment, which ultimately aims to answer the question of why there is more matter than antimatter in the universe.

Debbie said: “I’ve worked really hard throughout my degree, especially on my project, and I feel that reaching this stage shows it paid off.

“I loved working as part of the group and, even though my project often involved us working late into the night, it’s one of my most treasured experiences from my time at university.”

Both Heather and Debbie are going on to study at doctoral level.

Also shortlisted for a SET Award is 2009 graduate Alastair Copland, in the Best Biology or Biotechnology Student category. Alastair has just completed a four-year BSc in Molecular Medicine at Sussex.

All three shortlisted students will attend a personal interview before the judges in London on 24 September. The winners will be announced later the same day at a dinner and presentation ceremony.

Scholarship student in South Korea

A graduate student has returned from South Korea, where she presented a paper and chaired a panel during the World Civic Youth Forum (WCYF) 2009.

Nicola Chanamuto presented a paper on Filipino domestic workers in Singapore, which she had prepared for her Masters degree in Gender and Development at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

She also had the opportunity to discuss with other delegates the situation of migrant domestic workers in other contexts.

You can read Nicola’s report on the experience at www.sylff.org/2009/09/01/2674/ — the website of the Tokyo Foundation, which pays her tuition fees as a scholar of the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund, or SYLFF.

Nicola was able to attend the conference in Korea with an additional grant from the SYLFF Endowment.

SYLFF is a fellowship programme to support graduate students in humanities and social sciences who have high potential for future leadership in international affairs. To find out more about how the programme operates at Sussex, see www.sussex.ac.uk/scholarships_and_bursaries/pg/uk/sylff_fellowships.php

News in brief↓

Sportcentre car park being resurfaced

Work started on 24 August to replace the worn surface and reduce areas of water collection in the Sportcentre car park (P5). Preparatory work requires small areas of parking to be restricted until 18 September. Full removal and replacement of the top surface will require the closure of the car park from Monday 21 September until Friday 25 September.

Free scanning time

Do you have minimal imaging research experience? And an innovative research idea involving MRI, CT or PET-CT scanning? If so, free scanning time is on offer at the Clinical Imaging Sciences Centre (CISC). For an application pack, contact Pat Butler at CISC by 1 November: T 01273 876768 or email p.buiter@bsms.ac.uk

Student applicants must be able to complete any project before leaving the University. Located on the University of Sussex campus at Falmer, CISC provides an important resource for the Brighton and Sussex Medical School’s research, particularly in oncology and neuroscience. See www.bsms.ac.uk/research/cisc/

Free fitness advice in the great outdoors

Want to get fit but don’t know how? For the rest of the summer vacation Sussexsport is offering a walk-and-talk GetFit advice service. Join Mark Beresford (Health and Fitness Instructor) and Terry Cooper (Health and Fitness Development Officer) for a 30-minute walk at lunchtimes to get outside and become active while taking the opportunity to ask questions about health and fitness. The walks start from the Sportcentre at the following times: Mondays 12.15pm, Wednesdays 1.15pm and Fridays 1.15pm.

Conference on Sartre

Dr Benedict O’Donohoe, President of the UK Sartre Society, has organised a conference on the work of the French existentialist writer, which takes place in the Institut Français in London on 18 September. Benedict, a Senior Lecturer in Languages at Sussex and Deputy Director of the Sussex Language Institute (SLI), wrote his DPhil thesis on the theatre of Jean-Paul Sartre.

All articles are also featured on the internet at www.sussex.ac.uk/press_office/bulletin
New PVC (International) appointed

Professor Chris Marlin is to join the University of Sussex in the new senior post of Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International).

An Australian national, Professor Marlin is currently Professor of Computer Science at Flinders University in Adelaide, South Australia, where he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) from 2004-09 and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) from 1998-2004.

During this period, Professor Marlin developed a track record of significant management in the international arena, having cultivated a range of strategic international links for Flinders, including through his leading role in establishing research collaborations within the International Network of Universities and his mentoring of groups of Chinese university Vice- Presidents. He also played a role in the internationalisation of the Flinders curriculum, as co-author of an academic programme in globalisation.

Before joining Flinders in 1992, he held a range of academic positions at the University of Adelaide from 1984-91, including a period as Dean of the Faculty of Mathematical and Computer Sciences. Professor Marlin holds BSc and PhD degrees in Computing Science from the University of Adelaide.

From 1980-83 he was an Assistant Professor of Computer Science at the University of Iowa in the USA.

Welcoming Professor Marlin’s appointment, the Vice-Chancellor said: “This is an important new role for Sussex, and I am delighted to have secured someone of Professor Marlin’s calibre and experience.

“He will bring a strong international perspective and leadership to Sussex, ensuring that we can forge ahead with the internationalisation agenda which will be vital for our development.”

Professor Marlin said: “It is a pleasure to be joining the University of Sussex, a university with a strong international reputation. I look forward to working with the university community to develop a coherent and strategic approach to internationalisation in all its forms.”

The new role will provide senior academic leadership for the University’s internationalisation strategy.

After he takes up his role in late November, Professor Marlin will develop the University’s worldwide partnerships and links, and a principal task will be to increase the number of international students at Sussex in a fast-changing and competitive market. Addressing the internationalisation of the curriculum, the campus and the student experience will also be important, complementary tasks.

Like the other Pro-Vice-Chancellor posts, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) will be part of the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Group (VCEG) and will have direct line management for a number of the new heads of school.

New Registrar & Secretary appointed

John Duffy has been appointed as the new Registrar & Secretary and will take up the post on 1 November.

Mr Duffy has been Secretary and Director of Administration at St George’s, University of London (SGUL) since September 2004. Prior to that he was Head of Administration of the Joint Faculty of Health and Social Care Sciences between SGUL and Kingston University.

He has held management posts in a number of higher education institutions including the universities of Edinburgh, Newcastle and Sheffield and the Institute of Cancer Research.

Mr Duffy gained an MBA from City University London in 1991. He has an MA in American History from the University of Glasgow and was an exchange student at Georgetown University, Washington DC.

He replaces Dr Philip Harvey, who is leaving Sussex on 18 September to become Registrar and Secretary at the University of Sheffield.

The Registrar & Secretary is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for Professional Services – comprising all of the University’s support services other than Finance, the Library and IT Services.

The Professional Services employ some 650 people (550 full-time equivalent) and had a total turnover of £22m for 2008-09.

The directors of the Professional Services report directly to the Registrar & Secretary.

The Registrar & Secretary is Secretary to the University’s Court, Council and Senate. He attends or is a member of all key policy-making committees such as Strategy and Resources Committee and is a member of the Vice-Chancellor’s Executive Group (VCEG).

Announcing the appointment, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing, said: “The Professional Services support our academic mission and are a vital part of ensuring the effective development and delivery of our vision for Sussex.

“I am delighted that, from a strong field of candidates, we have been able to make this excellent appointment to the executive team.”

Mr Duffy said: “I am very much looking forward to supporting the Vice-Chancellor in addressing the challenges that lie ahead.”

In the short interim period before Mr Duffy takes up his post, three 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).

These 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.

FIRST CLASS

A blog about British and American English by Dr Lynne Murphy, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics, has been recognised in an online ranking. A total of 473 blogs from 26 countries were nominated in four categories for the Lexiophiles Top 100 Language Blogs: see http://en.bab.la/news/top-100-language-blogs-2009.html

Lynne’s blog, http://separatedbycommonlanguage.blogspot.com/ (“Observations on British and American English by an American linguist in the UK”), moved up to number 14 overall (from 40 in 2008) and was ranked number one in the ‘Language Professionals’ category. The ranking was based 50% on reader votes and 50% on the Lexiophiles ranking criteria – content, consistency and interactivity.

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation has granted a research award to Research

Professor John Nixon FRS, an inorganic chemist in the School of Life Sciences. The Foundation grants up to 100 Humboldt Research Awards each year, to eminent foreign researchers at the peak of their academic careers whose fundamental discoveries, new theories or insights have had a significant impact on their own discipline and who are expected to continue producing cutting-edge achievements in future. John’s citation reads: “In recognition of your academic achievements and your contribution to academic cooperation with German specialist colleagues.” Award winners are invited to spend up to one year co-operating on a long-term research project with colleagues at a research institution in Germany, John will spend three months during the next academic year at the University of Regensburg. This is the second time that he has received a Humboldt Research Award.
Student numbers up

The University has managed to fill a near-record number of undergraduate places, with more than 2,600 new home and EU undergraduate students expected at Sussex this autumn.

The original target was boosted by an additional 105 places from the national 10,000 made available by government in the summer (on a fees-only basis) in a range of programmes from subject areas including chemistry, biochemistry, mathematics, business and economics.

The quality of applicants taking up the small number of last-minute vacancies available at Sussex through Clearing was also relatively strong.

Professor Joanne Wright, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), said: "I am pleased that the hard work by admissions teams and colleagues across campus to confirm places has enabled us to look forward to welcoming so many undergraduates."

But she emphasised: "It is important to sustain the quality of our students' experience from day one."

And she added: "We are already well under way with recruitment for 2010. At the open day in October, for example, we want to boost interest in Sussex and further improve the quality of our intake."

International undergraduate numbers are harder to forecast, but some 240-250 students are predicted: up on last year, but not yet as high as the demanding targets set in the strategic plan for Sussex.

By contrast, the latest indications are that numbers of overseas postgraduates on taught degrees should be up significantly, as part of an increase in postgraduate applications as a whole.

An update on overall postgraduate numbers will be available later in September.

Record numbers preparing to study at Sussex

More than 240 students are currently studying English on the pre-sessional programme at the Sussex Language Institute (SLI), a significantly higher number than ever before.

The vast majority of these students are set to progress to a wide range of Masters programmes (notably in business, management and economics; global studies and development studies) at Sussex, with smaller numbers destined for undergraduate programmes and doctoral research.

Pre-sessional courses are intended for students who are about to enter degree programmes at an English-speaking university. In addition to developing students' overall command of English, the courses teach students essential study skills, such as understanding lectures, critical reading, note-taking and undertaking a research project.

This comes at the end of an exceptionally busy summer for SLI. The Institute has run a number of customised programmes for groups of teachers and trainers sponsored by overseas education ministries in addition to its usual pre-sessional, 'Summer at Sussex' and pre-service teacher-training programmes.

In June and July SLI delivered a course that included a programme of placements in local primary schools for the first of four groups of Spanish teachers sent to the University by the Comunidad de Madrid. Forty teachers participated in the programme, which included work on language and literacy, bilingualism, British culture and heritage and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning).

A further 90 primary and secondary school teachers from Madrid attended language development courses at the Institute in July and August.

SLI has also developed and delivered programmes for the Vocational Training Corporation of Saudi Arabia, Kio University, the University of the Sacred Heart, Kamakura Women’s University (Japan) and the Korean University of Technology this summer.

In addition, for the third year running the Institute ran its successful introductory 'English Teaching for Language Assistants’ course, one of only two such programmes in the country.

In total more than 750 students have attended courses between June and September.

Help to promote student rep elections

Teaching staff are being asked to promote the nomination and election of department and school student representatives at the beginning of the autumn term.

Student representatives can:
- provide helpful feedback to staff about courses and programmes,
- raise concerns in a constructive manner and give feedback to other students on why particular decisions are made, and
- help to prevent concerns from becoming serious issues.

For the first time, this year students can elect representatives for both their department and their school.

“Good publicity is essential to having the best reps and making sure the scheme works effectively,” says Jenni Grundy, Head of Student Support and Experience.

Information and guidance on how staff can publicise the elections is available at www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/1-4-2-12.

The site includes a link to a PowerPoint presentation designed for use in lectures in weeks 0-3, to help teaching staff to encourage students to participate, nominate themselves for election and vote.

The Students' Union will run an online nomination and voting system on www.studentreps.co.uk.

Nominations open on Wednesday 30 September and will close on Friday 16 October.

Voting will take place between Tuesday 20 October and Thursday 22 October at 12 noon.

'My Welcome Week’ blog competition

New students are being encouraged to share their first impressions of Sussex in a blog competition – and there’s a £150 cheque at stake.

The Events Team from Student Recruitment Services, who organise induction activities, will be inviting fresher bloggers to blog on a wide variety of topics including moving in, the Welcome Weekend, academic inductions, departmental orientation, campus services and facilities, making friends, their memorable moments and what they think of Brighton.

The theme of 'My Welcome Week’ will be open to individual interpretation, but entries must have the Welcome Weekend and Induction Week activities at their heart.

The competition will be judged on Friday 9 October by Tony Hudson (Web Team Manager), Jenni Grundy (Head of Student Support & Experience) and Tom Wills (President, Students’ Union).

The judges will be looking for blogs that are focused, well-written and entertaining, as well as considering their originality, personality and interpretation of the brief.

You can follow the blogs at http://splash.sussex.ac.uk; look out for blogs tagged 'My Welcome Week'.
Friston building going up

Work is well under way on the construction of a new temporary building on campus. This will allow Arts D and E to be cleared more quickly and more simply, bringing forward by a year the construction and opening of the major new £30m academic building planned for that space.

The new temporary building – to be named the Friston building – is being built on the northern edge of the Science car park (P1), behind the Anundel building and alongside the Hastings building. The setting, alongside woodland, prompted the naming after the Friston Forest in East Sussex.

The building will be two storeys high and will have academic and Professional Services office space and seminar rooms for general teaching. It is expected to be in use for three years.

The Friston building will be home to the School of Law, Politics and Sociology, pending the School’s move to the new academic building once that opens. The International Student Support and the Study Abroad Offices will also be based there, moving across the road from Mantel.

Ideally, the new temporary building would be in place for the start of the autumn term; unfortunately the timescale is simply too tight for this to be possible. Professional Services teams will move in as soon as the building is ready during the autumn term and academic units will then follow during the Christmas vacation.

The teaching space in the Friston building will replace all the seminar and general teaching space currently provided in Arts D and E – allowing work to start on demolishing those buildings in 2010.

As soon as the new teaching building next to the Swanborough residences opens in summer 2010, the Russell building will also be removed.

Improved signage for campus

A new range of external signs is being introduced on campus, to replace the array of old signage that has built up over the years.

This is the first time since the 1990s that a systematic overhaul of signage has taken place. Making this change now is seen as appropriate, as new schools have been created, new buildings have been put up and a number of buildings have been renamed.

The first step has already been taken with the simple, white, high-level signs on buildings, which have made navigation around campus much easier for first-time visitors.

Complementing this will be a range of new signage, which has been developed and planned following a ‘wayfinding strategy’ developed by Estates and Facilities Management (EFM) with external company f/developers. The design has been carefully developed to work with the campus parkland setting and distinctive architecture.

Dr Philip Harvey, Registrar and Secretary, said: “I am confident that when this is completed it will significantly enhance the look and feel of the campus, giving a better impression of Sussex, and improve the way in which our staff, students and visitors find their way around campus.”

The new suite of external signage includes:
- improved and well-lit map points across campus;
- a replacement finger-post system;
- new entrance signage for buildings, including space for temporary signs for events and activities;
- simplified road signage for vehicles; and
- electronic notice-boards at the entrances to campus.

Staff and students are asked to be patient as the change-over takes place during the autumn term.

Louisa Way, who leads the project for EFM, commented: “We would of course have preferred to complete this project before the start of the new academic year, but the extensive works and moves involved in the creation of the new schools have rightly been the priority over the summer.”

She also made clear that old signs and unnecessary signage clutter will be removed as part of the process, adding: “This is something which colleagues have been asking for for a number of years, and which I hope will also be welcomed.”

Catering development programme pushed back

Works to create a brand-new café at the heart of campus and to refurbish a small number of existing cafés have been put back a few weeks.

Construction work begins this autumn at the south end of Arts A (where bike racks are currently located) to install glazing between the red-brick arches and create a contemporary café in keeping with the local architecture.

This new outlet, unavoidably delayed by a hold-up in obtaining planning approval from English Heritage and other authorities, is now due to open shortly before Christmas.

Following a review of bookings and academic use, it has been agreed that the redevelopment of the Doctors’ Orders café in the Medical School building will now take place during the Christmas vacation.

The café in Chichester 1 will also be closed over the Christmas vacation to enable refurbishment work to take place, reopening for the start of the spring term.

And as part of a major refurbishment of the Library, due to take place between December 2009 and spring 2011, an upgraded café with a courtyard area will be created on the ground floor.

This initial phase of capital works is part of a major investment of £10m over the next two years. The catering plan consolidates the number of outlets, with fewer but larger cafés spread across the campus, in the optimum locations for different groups of staff and students.

In addition to improvements in the location and design of campus cafés, a major feature of the project is the modernisation of Bramber House, due to start at Easter 2010 and comprising the remodelling and refurbishment of both the ground and first floors and the installation of a new central kitchen.

The main aim of the investment in catering is to enhance the experience of all customers on campus, including students, staff and visitors. Another key objective is to support Catering Services in delivering a financial surplus, ensuring reinvestment in the facilities in future years.