Marine Institute Annual report 2025

This document provides an account of the activities undertaken by the Marine Institute, including the events and initiatives it has supported and enabled. The activities are organised according to the Institute's aims to facilitate evaluation of progress and performance against each aim.

1. Foster connectivity, coherence and inclusivity in marine and maritime activities internally and externally

- MRP PhD studentship appointment. Round for Oct25 intake was launched at the start of Jul24. Three proposals of sufficient quality were received, and all were taken forward to external advertising in the autumn. The closing date for candidate applications was 8th January with interviews conducted on the 27th of February. The interview process was competitive and one excellent candidate was appointed to work on a project focused on ocean-based carbon dioxide removal technologies. The new cycle for an Oct26 intake was launched at the end of Jun25 following confirmation of budget availability both internally and at the MBA. The call closed in September and six proposals were received from which three were selected for external advertising.

- Attendance at regular Research Group meetings, including: the Marine Conservation Research Group (MCRG), the Sustainable Food Production Research Group (SFPRG) and the Environmental Psychology Research Group. Presentation and exchange at Maritime Transport Research Group (12/12/24) and Coastal Processes Research Group (12/02/25).

- Helped organise MRP Research Dialogue #8 on “Harnessing AI for Ocean Science”, held at PML on 02/04/25. Due to a delay incurred in the organisation of Dialogue #8 as a result of staffing problems, no further Dialogues were scheduled ahead of the summer. Instead, Dialogue #9 was planned for the autumn with a novel format. The event, held on 19/11/25 at the UoP, was delivered in collaboration with the UoP Arts Institute and focused on the co-production of significant outcomes between science and the Arts, as part of the Sea for Yourself project. If the approach proves successful, a subsequent Dialogue is planned to explore co-delivery of outcomes between the physical and social sciences. Both Dialogues were well-attended by staff from all three partners and selected attendees from Plymouth City Council.

- Chaired the newly formed MRP Executive Group for 2024-2025 and defined Terms of Reference and associated measures of success. Also produced a budget plan and relevant reference framework for the newly available collective budget and facilitated the launch of the new Strategic Awards (e.g., produced the application form) in January, which make funds available to staff wishing to carry out or suggest activities of strategic importance to MRP. Activities funded included the production of joined-up marketing materials across MRP and the NCCA and the production of a roadmap for future ORE developments, which were both delivered throughout 2025.



- Supported the organisation of an MRP celebration event at The Box on the evening of the 9th January 2025, to mark the re-signing of the MoU between

the three partners for a further three years in July 2024. Attendees were able to explore the Planet Ocean exhibition.

- Work is still in progress to develop a form of digital interaction with the physical model of Plymouth Sound previously produced and to explore different types of information. Various meetings with colleagues from the Arts took place in early 2025 towards development of a detailed project brief and a defined budget, which incurred delay due to restructuring of the Design Studio. This was picked up in the autumn and enveloped involvement from Plymouth City Council. It was decided to delay development of an augmented reality game experience and to concentrate on a digitally rendered fly-through of Plymouth Sound, focused on the journey of an Allis Shad encountering various features that are now or have been important topics of research.



- The MI is continuing its discussions with the MBA to re-deploy the PLUTO underwater webcam, to enable public interaction with marine life in the Plymouth Sound. Technical difficulties have delayed this process significantly and means it is still ongoing.

- Following the relocation of the Plymouth Business School (PBS) to the heart of Main Campus in the spring of 2025, the MI organised a workshop and networking session on 8th October 2025 themed around connecting marine and maritime research with business to explore new opportunities for collaboration. The workshop, chaired by the head of the Business School and opened by the Executive Faculty Dean, was attended by 40–50 staff and showcased business subject areas, including finance, economics, tourism and shipping, as well as environmental and social science topics that could benefit from closer collaboration and previous success stories. A good number of new connections were forged, which parties agreed to follow up.



2. Increase external income for marine and maritime research and commercial activity

- Building on a relationship forged at the end of 2023 by Naomi Box from Development and Alumni Relations, Helikon Shipping Enterprises Ltd. made the first instalment of their agreed philanthropic donation to the University and particularly to the Marine Institute in 2024, with further payments to follow over the course of three consecutive years, supporting a PhD studentship scheme proposed by the MI Director, taking on three new students each year for three years (2025–2027). All nine studentships will be fully supported to a value between £900K to £1.4M, depending on fee rates of the successful candidates. The MI developed all aspects of the studentship scheme and will manage it for the duration. The PhD studentship scheme, named SERVO (Solutions for thE maRine enVirOnment), centres on solutions-focused research on marine sustainability topics and offers three pathways to proposal submission, including single and multiple staff-led proposals, but also the much rarer opportunity for prospective PhD students from around the world to write a proposal on their own idea and compete for funding. In answer to the call launched in the summer for an Oct25 intake, 20 proposals were received and nine projects were shortlisted (6 staff-led and 3 student-led). The staff-led proposals were put up for external advertising late in the autumn. Candidate applications closed on 5th Feb and interviews were conducted on 25–26th Mar. Three excellent candidates were appointed: one to a staff-led proposal on marine

heatwaves and two to student-led projects on marine plastic pollution and coastal infrastructure vulnerability, both in island nations. The new cycle for an Oct26 intake was launched at the end of Jun25. The call closed in October and received 21 submissions, from which 6 proposals were selected.

- Continued support of bid development and submission towards NERC's Value of Marine Artificial Structures (ValMAS). UoP is to lead a work package on the environmental impacts of marine infrastructure, focusing on the protection of natural capital and introduction of habitat enhancement, as well as the translation of such any measures into other industries beyond oil and gas. This bid was received favourably but eventually not successful (final three).

- Participated in discussions around the establishment of an Advanced Marine Technology Hub (03/04/25), inviting views of relevant academic staff on the potential benefits and drawbacks of such a development.

3. Optimise UoP capacity and capability for marine and maritime activity (research and teaching)

- Continued exploration of further informative visual elements to the Marine Building main lobby and East stairwell, but this was put on hold due to budget constraints. Instead, an online tour guide for the suite of posters installed in 2024 was delivered. This is hosted on the MI SharePoint site.

- Maximise member benefits from paid-for subscriptions / partnerships with professional societies and organisations.

- Facilitated internal stakeholder discussions around the creation of an Advanced Marine Technology Hub in Plymouth and whether to take a leadership role in the project.

- Produced monthly newsletters to disseminate opportunities and highlight achievements and recent events.

4. Increase local, national and international profile / impact

- The MI funded and facilitated the delivery of two evidence pods at Evidence Week in Parliament in January 2025, organised by Sense about Science. The event was postponed from June 2024 due to the general election taking place around that time. The event is an opportunity for parliamentarians and researchers to come together to share knowledge and insights that will help politicians to scrutinise evidence. The topics featured were evidencing fish stock and habitat benefits of offshore aquaculture and the impacts of artificial light pollution on marine biodiversity. Policy briefs on both topics were produced.
  Decision-making and organisation around participation in Evidence Week in the autumn of 2025 was taken off the MI and placed with the Head of Research Strategy and Governance in RP&I.



- Assisted in the delivery of the online dissemination seminar (webinar) of Ropes to Reefs (23/01/25) and final stakeholder workshop (12/02/25), a project focused on the potential environmental benefits of shellfish and seaweed aquaculture sites.

- Contributed to the autumn 2025 submission of the Times Higher Education impact rankings for 2026, which draws on evidence from the 2023-2024 academic year.

- In collaboration with our delivery partner, Seadream Education CIC, the MI facilitated UoP participation in the Ocean Discovery Zone (ODZ) at the Devon County Show 2025 on 15–17 May in Exeter, which is a regional outreach event. Topics represented included Marine Protected Areas, coastal protection, offshore renewable energy, plastic pollution and zero-waste efforts around fisheries bycatch. Our partner said: "the ODZ was a major attraction at the Show, drawing in thousands of visitors and winning the Bronze Award for Most Attractive Feature. The event provided a high-impact platform for public engagement, student experience, and collaborative outreach on marine science, environmental issues, and climate resilience. Over 101,500 visitors attended the show, with the ODZ described as 'buzzing all weekend' by attendees and partner organisations. We are grateful for the UoP's funding and partnership, which made this zone stand out this year and enabled the public to experience the university's leadership in marine research, education, and community engagement".



- The MI Director has attended a range of high profile and influential meetings and events. He was invited to act as keynote speaker or panellist at some of these events. They include:
    - Our Ocean Conference in Busan, Korea on 28–30 April 2025 (marine plastic pollution)
    - Symposium to celebrate International Day for Women in Maritime at IMO headquarters, London on 16 May 2025
    - UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France on 9–13 June 2025 (to enable evidence-based decision-making to protect ocean health and sustainability)
    - UNEP INC 5.2 in Geneva, Switzerland on 5–14 August 2025 (Global Plastics Treaty)
    - 2025 Plastics, Human Health, and Solutions Symposium of the NYU Langone Health Center for the Investigation of Environmental Hazards (CIEH) in New York, USA on 22 September 2025

- Started a LinkedIn page (showcase page linked to the University of Plymouth) for the Marine Institute, to broadcast good news stories and advertise widely for student opportunities. The page has already attracted 386 followers since the start of June 2025.

5. Enhance student offer in marine and maritime

- MRP PhD studentship (see 1.) & SERVO PhD studentship (see 2.)

- Ashfords annual philanthropic donation: A total of nine bursary recipients were confirmed in January, who completed their activities throughout 2025. Outcomes are reported on the website and experience reports for the 2024 cohort were passed on to the funder. The Project Prize also saw its First and Second Prizes awarded in the spring, and one Scholarship was awarded in September. Due to Graduation taking place in October this year, the annual

photo opportunity with Ashfords representatives included the Second Project Prize winner and the Scholarship recipient. The funding agreement was renewed in the autumn of 2024 and payment was received in the spring of 2025. The call for the 2026 bursary applications was held between October and December, with the aim to award in January 2026. In the autumn, Ashfords also held interviews with two bursary recipients and a scholarship recipient in the autumn to produce Youtube shorts to disseminate the impact of the philanthropic donation.

- New Collaborative Research Visits scheme for PhD students, to help academics explore and strengthen new collaborative ambitions. It was attempted to obtain Turing funding for this opportunity through Plymouth Global in 2024 and 2025, but proved unsuccessful both times due to drastic cuts. A philanthropic funding option will be explored next.

- The MI is an active partner in the Plymouth Marine Science and Education Foundation (PlyMSEF). In 2025, management of the foundation was handed over from PML to UoP. The foundation offers an annual grant-in-aid, which provides travel grants to enable research students to attend academic conferences and symposia or to attend advanced training courses or workshops in marine disciplines. The MI supported this in terms of advertising and participation in the shortlisting panel. Other activities include the ECR conference (held at PML on 15th May 2025), the Spring Lecture (held at the NMA on 14th May 2025), and the Plymouth Marine Science Medal Lecture (held on 6th March 2025 at UoP, which was the 2024 lecture postponed from the preceding autumn, as well as on 6th November 2025 at UoP). The MI and the wider University supports these events in terms of advertising, the use of local facilities and support from the Events Team. The MI also maintains the partnership webpage, hosted on the UoP website, and the MI Director routinely attends PlyMSEF Trustees Board meetings.

Internal organisation and development

- Regular meetings with Strategy Team and Consultancy Group.

- In light of internal restructuring and staff changes, both SRIs (MI and SEI) met with various support functions within the University (RP&I, Doctoral College, Marketing & Communications) in the autumn to design a new and improved way of engaging, that would help deliver on the aims of the SRIs. Slides were produced to visualise the SRI new structure and engagement strategy.

- Building on work from 2023 and 2024, the MI has continued to work to refresh and update its web presence, working closely with the Research Marketing team.

- The MI Director regularly attended Faculty Leadership Team (FoSE) meetings.

- The MI supports organisations of local, national and global importance through annual membership and partner contributions. These include:
    - Devon Maritime Forum