A ROYAL DOCTORATE TO MARK THE OPENING OF THE PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY MARINE BUILDING

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE CITY

UNIVERSITY SIGNS SRI LANKA PARTNERSHIP

ICCI AT THE OLYMPIAD AND AN IT REVOLUTION ON CAMPUS
For the second time in just three editions, a Royal occasion graces the front cover of CONNECT...what a remarkable year 2012 has been! And the opening of the Marine Building, with HRH The Duke of Edinburgh as the very special guest of honour, rather encapsulates all that has been special about it.

Here is a building whose cutting-edge facilities – including the most sophisticated wave tanks in the country, and a navigation centre that will have the casual deck hand swaying with motion dizziness – express the confidence of the University’s direction – a centre of excellence for teaching and research and a catalyst for enterprise and innovation.

It is also a link to a proud past, both in terms of Plymouth’s seafaring and naval heritage, and the University’s roots as a School of Navigation.

That essence of glancing back and looking forward has been the theme of the 150th anniversary celebrations, and we devote four pages of the edition to the crescendo of events that took place this term.

Once again CONNECT has sought out some interesting people from across the institution – including our new Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Ray Playford.

Enjoy the issue.

Andrew Merrington
Editor
A ROYAL OPENING FOR THE MARINE BUILDING

It is home to one of the most sophisticated wave tanks in the world, and a ship simulator that will be used to train mariners for generations to come. If ever there was a building fit to be opened by the Lord High Admiral of the Royal Navy, this was it.

And so it was that on Tuesday 30th October, HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, publicly unveiled Plymouth University’s £19 million Marine Building, pulling back the curtain on the commemorative limestone boulder outside its entrance – and on the state-of-the-art facilities contained therein.

For the 300 VIPs and guests invited to be a part of the occasion, and who were all granted tours in the afternoon, it was a first insight into the building’s potential value to the city and the region, both as a centre of excellence in the development of marine renewable energy technology, and a platform to enhance the already deep relationships with major maritime organisations.

The occasion was also marked by the presentation of an Honorary Doctorate of Marine Science to HRH The Prince Philip, in recognition of his naval career, at an intimate ceremony in the Marine Navigation Centre on the first floor.

Professor Wendy Purcell, Vice-Chancellor, said: “It was an honour to welcome HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, to our University and invite him to formally open our new Marine Building. The history of Plymouth is inextricably linked to the sea, and this education and research facility represents the next chapter in our history – it’s a symbol of confidence and ambition as we explore new horizons.

“We are also delighted to welcome Prince Philip into our distinguished alumni community, and recognise his contribution to the Royal Navy – which fittingly began in Plymouth in 1936.”

The day began with Prince Philip being given a tour of the building by Professor Martin Attrill, Director of the Marine Institute, and Professor Purcell, which included visiting its three wave testing facilities, the Marine Navigation Centre, with its ship simulators and electronic chart reading rooms; and the new MARIC business innovation centre on the 3rd floor.

After the presentation of the doctorate, Prince Philip joined Professor Purcell outside the building, and while the media and members of the public all focused their cameras, he removed the cover over the limestone boulder to complete the formal opening.

While Prince Philip then met students and staff from the institution at Portland Villas, the VIPs were treated to a genuinely unique performance, which demonstrated that the term ‘musical instrument’ could be added to the Marine Building’s list of capabilities. Using motion detection pads and water sensors, Dr Alexis Kirke, of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Computer Music Research, and Composer-in-Residence, at the Marine Institute performed Sound-Wave to the amazement of the guests. Aided by some student ‘water drummers’, Alexis summoned different wave patterns to generate a 12-minute sub-aqua symphony.

Professor Simon Handley, Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, said: “It was a genuinely jaw-dropping moment; this was the first time that many people had seen the wave tank – indeed any wave tank – in operation, and the combination of that power and precision, with Alexis’ music, created a memorable effect.”

In reality the building has already been at the heart of several research and development projects, and has hosted several marine renewable energy clients in testing new energy devices. The value of the day for many of those invited – including representatives from prominent businesses and organisations within the marine and maritime sectors, as well as MPs, naval officers and other universities – was to meet academics in the Marine Institute and to see the technology in ‘full flow’.

Adam Corney, Marine Commercial Director, said: “We had some key industry and sector figures with us on the day, and this was our opportunity to showcase not just the technology, but the expertise that we have within the Marine Institute and the wider University. It was clear that we made a big impression, and we’re talking to potential clients in Australia, the US and Europe even at this early stage.”
Professor Martin Attrill explains the purpose of the wave tanks to HRH The Prince Philip. Below, The Duke of Edinburgh visits the ship simulator and officially opens the Marine Building.
From the opening verse of a specially commissioned poem, cut into the commemorative boulder, to giant triptychs, prints and photography adorning its walls, the Marine Building is home to as much artistic expression as it is raw technology and engineering.

Tim Guy, Brand and Campus Design Director, brought together a team of artists to help express the Marine Institute’s breadth of expertise through poetry, illustration and photography. He said: “We wanted to marry art with science and express all of the different disciplines in the field – from marine biology to navigation – and reflect the work being conducted in the building.” For the poetry, Tim turned to Falmouth-based writer Caroline Carver. Caroline told CONNECT: “I was taken on a tour of the building and I was awestruck by both the power of the wave tank and the task at hand, of capturing that sense of water inertia through the poetry.

“In the end it was the subconscious that came up with the ideas, which is how it works in poetry: you throw everything into the melting pot that lives at the back of your head, and wait for it to talk to you! This project has been so immense! I feel so rewarded and fortunate and honoured to have been a part of it.”

Caroline produced four different approaches, with the Vice-Chancellor invited to choose the final poem. With that done, the process began to inscribe If you are to understand water both upon the commemorative stone outside the building and on the walls within it.

Hidden by a makeshift ‘studio’, renowned stone-cutter Lida Cardozo Kindersley went to work on the boulder, which had been hewn from an Ashburton quarry and given to the
University by the Marine Building’s contractors Leadbitter. Using only chisels and hammers, Lida and her team of apprentices from her Cambridge studio began to carve out the ornate lettering.

Lida said: “It is a beautiful stone, but one that is incredibly tough – almost ‘unapproachable’. You have to get to know it and we smashed quite a few chisels in the process! It was back-breaking work, but we’re really happy with the results.”

Illustration lecturer Tom Barwick was commissioned to produce the artwork, and he worked over the summer to create a total of 13 pieces. He said: “From my home in Penryn I have a view of the ocean, so I took inspiration from that. I also came into the building and spent time talking to Andrew Eccleston and Bob Hone – and they provided a wonderful source of knowledge and ideas.”

Tom used red chalk to create the illustrations, and these have been upscaled and transferred to canvas or acrylic using modern digital processes. The final works include the centrepiece White Horses, which is hung in the reception, and two 30-feet long triptychs of the ocean in the atria on the second floor.

Tim said: “Not only does the art express our marine and maritime heritage and expertise, but it also acts as a teaching trail for our students to learn about the techniques used in the original rendering and the final reproduction of the pieces using digital media.”
From the School of Navigation to an award-winning university – Plymouth celebrates a very special birthday.

It is fair to say that 2012 has been a very special year for Plymouth University. Awarded a Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education; shortlisted as University of the Year by Times Higher Education; becoming the first modern university to set up its own medical and dental school; staging a Royal opening of the new Marine Building; and being the first university to be awarded Regional Growth Fund money to help lead economic regeneration. This, alongside a myriad of student and staff accolades and prizes, meant there was a lot to celebrate on the 150th anniversary date of 24th October.

One can only imagine what Dr John Merrifield would have made of it all when he founded the School of Navigation in 1862 to provide education and training to the maritime sector. Could he have imagined how his innovation and confidence in young people would have gone on to become the truly world-class University Plymouth is today?

“We are rightly proud of our University, we’ve grown in size, reputation and confidence,” said Professor Wendy Purcell, Vice-Chancellor. “Meeting Her Majesty The Queen to collect the Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education was certainly a highlight of this year for me. Alongside me on the day were staff and students...
of our University, and we paused to savour the moment and reflect on just how far we’ve come and what we’ve achieved together in marine and maritime education since our establishment as a School of Navigation 150 years ago.”

A year of ‘glancing back, and looking forward’ has been the theme of the 150th, and a commitment to creating a legacy with each event or programme. Prestige lectures have brought inspirational figures to the city, such as Tom Bloxham and Charles Clarke, who will go on to support the University in different ways; the launch of the 150 Scholarships has and will provide financial support to enable talented students to realise their potential; and the planting of rare trees and the installation of sculptures and building plaques has helped to create a heritage trail on campus.

The 150th has also seen Plymouth engage with new audiences, such as through the alumni event held at the House of Lords, to the sponsoring and hosting of the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Arts Competition at the Royal Cornwall Show – not to mention special anniversary versions of the Vice-Chancellor’s Enterprise Awards and the Graduation Ceremonies.

Professor Purcell said: “Our anniversary has enabled us to engage with and meet new people, and to tell our story and showcase what we’re about today. It has been fantastic to share it with the whole University community, with staff, students and local people and with our partners overseas.”

And the University has reached out to a lot of people during our special year: some 50,000 people attended a 150th anniversary or 150 aligned event, including 16,000 people from schools, the community and business, and a total of £60,000 was raised in sponsorship. Many more have interacted through social media and online channels.

Several hundred people were also in attendance for the 150th birthday celebration itself, which featured the unveiling of the Curious Campus tour – memorably brought to life by local theatre company Stiltskin – as well as the memorial sculpture ‘Enterprise’, created by BA (Hons) Product Design students Sean Bunton and Chris Grover. Professor Purcell said: “I think we celebrated in style, and we saw some fantastic examples of our creativity – just look at the huge range of submissions to the new Plymouth Prints programme! And it was very fitting indeed that I cut our birthday cake together with our Students’ Union President Jazz Singh-Khaira to signify the close partnership we have with our students.”

With the focus now on the development of our new Plymouth University 2020 strategy, Professor Purcell said she was very much looking forward to the future. “Our development over the past 150 years has put us in a very strong position from which to build for the future,” she said. “We are a really good University and I want us to be a great University. We are confident and innovative, and our students and staff are some of the most talented and committed people I have met. We are a University that is very much on the ascendency – so there is a lot to keep us busy for the next 150 years!”

“We are rightly proud of our University, we’ve grown in size, reputation and confidence,”

Professor Wendy Purcell
Vice-Chancellor
LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION FOR SRI LANKA LAUNCH OF NEW PARTNERSHIP

It is not every day that a university launches an international partnership live on national television; even rarer for it to be preceded by an appearance from ‘Laser Man’ and heralded by the firing of a ‘glitter cannon’. But that was scene set for the symbolic union of Plymouth University and the National School of Business Management (NSBM) in Sri Lanka.

The day-long launch in Colombo, in July, was attended by 400 guests including University representatives, government officials, parents and students, and was sealed by a ceremonial lighting of an oil lamp and the shaking of hands between Professor Wendy Purcell, Vice-Chancellor, and Dr EA Weerasinghe, CEO of NSBM.

It was the culmination of one of the most intense marketing campaigns in the University’s history, and a testament to the collaborative efforts of the launch team working with counterparts in Colombo.

Professor Simon Payne, Head of Academic Partnerships, was a key part of that team. He said: “We signed the agreement in May to jointly deliver Plymouth degrees with NSBM – and that meant we had barely three months to generate the momentum we needed for a successful September intake of students.

“We pulled together a multidisciplinary team from across the University, and liaising closely with NSBM and the British Council, we formulated an approach that was culturally sensitive and appropriate to the country and the market.”

Drawing upon the academic expertise of the School of Management’s Associate Professor Dr Dulekha Kasturiratne, as well as the creative talents of Saatchi and Saatchi, the campaign focused upon the University’s entrepreneurial links with Sri Lanka through projects such as the PMI2 (Prime Minister’s Initiative), competitions such as FLUX, and The Apprentice-style IDEATORS. It also emphasised the quality of its courses, the opportunities to study in Plymouth, and the credentials of the teaching staff.

Jane Chafer, Director of External Relations, said: “The most exciting thing about the campaign was that we had to deliver it in about three weeks. We’re accustomed to taking an 18-month lead-time with our planned campaigns; here we had 18 days, which meant we had to work across teams and institutions in a very collaborative manner. We decided to go all out!”

The finished campaign included national advertising, online and social media work coordinated from the UK, billboard ads, and extensive interviews with television, radio and print media once the project team arrived for the Colombo kick off. It also saw Professor...
Purcell take part in a ceremony to lay the foundation stone to mark the start of construction of NSBM’s new green campus on the outskirts of the capital.

“The partnership launch had to be done in a particular way,” said Dulekha, who is also the Head of Academic Relations Development (Sri Lanka) on the project. “There is a traditional emphasis on spectacle and ceremony, almost like a movie premiere, with a great sense of importance. Government officials were present, and the event was broadcast on national television.”

As the cameras rolled, there were speeches from all parties, an ‘illuminating’ performance from Laser Man, and ultimately a trip to the Parliament building to meet more stakeholders. Part of the success was also down to the involvement of students and alumni – including Adam Pavey, who has become something of a Sri Lankan celebrity and heartthrob following his long run in IDEATORS in 2011.

As Jane Chafer said, “Our campaign included that element of student-to-student dialogue, not just institution-to-institution. And that reflects the way this agreement opens up overseas study options for both NSBM and Plymouth students.”

The partnership encompasses the delivery of Plymouth degrees – initially in computing and business management, but with more expected to come online in future years – to NSBM, with Plymouth academics travelling to Colombo to take lectures and seminars during years two and three of the course. As a result of the campaign, 170 students enrolled in September – well above the target set – with more expected to join from other pathways from next year.

Professor Purcell said: “This is a very significant strategic partnership for the University and one which creates exciting international opportunities for both our students and staff, as well as the students in Sri Lanka. We are helping to build an educational legacy with our partners.

“It was a memorable launch, lots of fun and quite unlike anything we have been involved with before!”

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Jane Chafer
Director of External Relations
FEATURE

DIGITAL REVOLUTION: HOW TECHNOLOGY AND INFORMATION SERVICES BROKE NEW GROUND WITH PlymDESK6

It has been the biggest project of its kind undertaken by a university in the UK higher education sector: a complete ‘IT refresh’ of nearly 5,500 personal computers for staff and students.

Kevin Bentley and Joe Grant
That figure alone can only hint at the complexity of a transition programme that required delivery into a live environment with as little impact as possible upon business activity. And it hardly does justice to the potential benefits, which will see the University’s IT power consumption reduced by 50 per cent, and a laptop-led culture of flexible working in line with the forthcoming digital strategy.

The project – PlymDESK6 – will be completed in January, on schedule, some 12 months after the process to source a new fleet of machines fit for the future began in earnest. It has involved every area of Technology and Information Services (TIS), not to mention staff from across the institution who played their part in helping to shape the ‘shopping list’.

Joe Grant, Senior Project Manager in TIS, said: “This has been a huge operation – the biggest so far in the university sector. But its significance is less about the scale, and more to do with the way in which we have reached out across the institution to gather requirements. This is no like-for-like replacement; we’ve asked people what set-up they need to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, and our aim has been to match at least 95 per cent of those user needs.”

This customer focus has included a period of consultation with staff on the technology they require, and an invitation to a showcase of competing kit from those companies involved in the tendering process. A group of ‘early adopters’ were also used to test the hardware, before the roll out of Toshiba laptops and Viglen desktops commenced in the summer.

Kevin Bentley, Deployment Team Manager, said: “The first phase involved the replacement of some 2,100 student desktops, located not just in teaching areas across the Plymouth campus, such as the Open Access Area in Babbage, but also in Truro, Taunton and Yeovil as well. It was important we did this in August so that there would be no disruption to the student experience for when the new academic year began.

“The second phase has been even more complex because we’ve had to deploy into a live environment. So that can mean anything from ensuring that business critical systems are migrated across without any interruption, to making sure that a staff member is in their office when we come to replace their hardware and that they’ve backed up all of the data they need.”

The element of choice, with the introduction of new lightweight laptops with monitors and docking stations, represents a fundamental shift in culture for many people across the University.

Joe said: “We’ve more than doubled the laptop fleet, with 1,900 now in service. As our University grows nationally and internationally, so our people are becoming increasingly mobile in where they work. The switch to Windows 7 will also help to reduce the amount of time it takes to log in, which we know has been an issue.”

PlymDESK6 has also focused on more than just hardware issues: on the software side some 300 desktop applications required for teaching and learning, research, and business processing have had to be migrated across to Windows 7 (from Windows XP) and put through stringent testing procedures. This has ranged from standard software packages like Microsoft Word and Excel to specialist research and laboratory software.

One of the key aims of PlymDESK6 has been to support the University’s new digital strategy, one of the architects of which has been Professor Steve Furnell, Head of the School of Computing and Mathematics. He said: “PlymDESK6 supports the Digital Strategy by giving our students and staff access to a more modern operating system environment, and providing hardware that’s capable of supporting the latest applications. For staff, the transition to laptops helps to support the increasingly flexible way in which we now work and communicate, by enabling access from the same device in any location. It also allows them to take advantage of the wireless connectivity around campus, delivering access to digital services and resources without having to feel tied to their office.”

“This is no like-for-like replacement; we’ve asked people what set-up they need to do their jobs to the best of their abilities, and our aim has been to match at least 95 per cent of those user needs.”

Joe Grant
Senior Project Manager in TIS
Professor Ray Playford joined the University on 1st September from the University of Tasmania, where he was Dean of the Faculty of Health Science. Beginning his career as a medical gastroenterologist in London, and still an active researcher in his field, Ray has also held senior positions at Queen Mary, University of London and Barts, the London School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Q What are your first impressions of the University?

The three things that have come through are, firstly, that our students really are at the centre of all decisions that are made. This is not tokenism but a real desire to ensure that every student gets the best possible university experience and that we set them on a career path with the best information and the correct skills. The second is that I’ve been very impressed by the high quality of the buildings and the infrastructure, which make the campus feel like somewhere that is good to work and study and is ‘on the up’. Thirdly, I have a sense that staff and students are on a shared mission; we all know we are doing well in both teaching and research, and we’re now going out to show the world just how good we can be.

Q What do you think you will be able to bring to the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor?

Universities fulfil many important roles such as education and research, being an anchor for the community and ensuring its graduates are ‘fit for purpose’ and in the best possible situation to achieve their goals and ambitions. I understand the difficulties of achieving on all these fronts and have first-hand experience of being a manager, clinician, researcher and an educator; not an easy thing to juggle, but immensely enjoyable. I am also a strong advocate of widening participation. I was the first person from my family to go to university and I attended a comprehensive school in Moss Side, Manchester (Ducie High School) where very few people went on to higher education. I saw the huge waste of talent that occurred because of a lack of role models and supportive home and school environments. I will do my best to help every student to achieve their potential.

My previous experience of running a health faculty and involvement in health systems in several countries will be useful to support our medical, dental, nursing and allied healthcare interests. I’m very excited by the potential of our new medical and dental schools, and it is great that they’ve had fantastic interest with very strong application numbers. In my various roles in the private and public sector, I’ve also learned the importance of working in partnership with industry, which is a key aspect of the Plymouth University philosophy and its enterprise culture.

Modern living is complex and in many ways, is much faster moving than in previous generations. I have first-hand experience of the joys and tribulations of a two-career family with children and am a strong supporter of initiatives such as the Athena Swan Award system to support women in the workplace. I am delighted that Plymouth University shares these values and will continue to drive this agenda.

Q What are some of the challenges/opportunities you’re looking forward to tackling?

We are a world-class university that is reaching out to, and supporting, our local community in the South West. Getting the balance right of achieving on an international stage, while being an integral part of our community, is one of our strengths and
will need to be continually nurtured. The development of our new Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, building on the success of our previous joint school, is an exciting development. We have the opportunity to deliver the highest quality research-informed education and to also build our research base. We have always had a good relationship with our healthcare partners, such as Derriford Hospital, and having our own medical and dental school, working alongside our nursing and allied health provision schools, allows us to ensure that we are following a shared vision that benefits the health of our local population and the wider community.

Q Can you tell us a little of your research background?

As a gastroenterologist (sometimes referred to as stomach doctor), I have always been fascinated by the fact that we have a system that allows us to digest virtually anything that we eat (including things such as tripe and haggis which are the intestines of other animals) but that we don’t auto-digest ourselves! It is, therefore, clear that we have really good defence and repair mechanisms. My research has focused on how the body repairs itself; when we understand these processes, we can stimulate repair to occur faster using the same molecules that are naturally involved. This led on to my second general area of research involving food products as medicines, a research area known as nutriceuticals. There are many ‘natural’ products available in health food shops, health magazines and on the internet making medicinal claims. Some have validity and some are quackery. My research group treats such products as potential medicines and analyses them in the same way that we would any new classical ‘drug’.

We sometimes work with commercial partners in this regard and importantly, always ensure that there are no restrictions on publishing our results before we agree to collaborate. Most recently, we have been examining a product called colostrum, which is the milk produced by cows for the first few days following calving. It is rich in immune and growth factors and we have shown it to be biologically active in a number of situations, including clinical trials.

Q Can you tell us one thing that your colleagues don’t yet know about you?

Several years ago, the magazine Men’s Health spoke to me to seek my advice on an article they were covering. As part of the conversation I offered myself to be a front page model. Much to my surprise, they politely rejected the offer!

“I offered myself to be a front page model. Much to my surprise, they politely rejected the offer!”
“There is great potential for IHC to become central to so much work across the lifecourse.”

“Our remit is life,” says Professor Gayle Letherby, reflecting upon the aims and ambitions of the University’s Institute of Health and Community (IHC). “We provide a critical eye on the lifecourse and key lifecourse events and experiences; what individuals do; their position in society; the chances and opportunities they have or otherwise. Whether it’s schools, hospitals, families, prisons, or even trains – we’re focused both upon researching these key issues, and looking at the best methods of conducting that research.”

IHC is truly multidisciplinary, bringing together academics and practitioners, and embracing the work of, not least, health and medical scientists, social scientists and educationalists. This is a challenge that Gayle is relishing, having overseen the launch of the IHC in March of this year. It encompasses three embedded research centres – the Centre for Culture, Community and Society (CCCS), the Centre for Health and Social Care Innovation (CHeSCI), and the Centre for Methodological Innovations (CMI).

Gayle said: “Much of our focus so far has been upon making connections, both within the Faculty of Health, Education and Society and across the institution. We now have a hub of people drawn from a wide area – from geography and arts, to business and medicine – who are actively involved in working with us.

“We’re talking with the Institute for Sustainability Solutions Research and with the Law and Criminal Justice Centre because we can see clear synergies there, and just recently the oral and dental health researchers have joined CHeSCI as a research cluster. From endocrinology to sociology – we’re involved in some very constructive discussions.”

IHC is now looking to further develop its existing external relationships and reputation. For example, its forthcoming conference will be a key part of the 2013 Festival of Research, and will focus upon community engagement. Given the potential synergies, it also comes as little surprise that IHC is now closely involved with the Vice-Chancellor’s Community Research Awards.

Building on the successful Seminar Series launched in 2011, 2013 will see leading academics provide a programme of lectures on topics ranging from family perspectives on allowing death after a serious brain
injury, to arts-based biographical methods. IHC is also attempting to increase the potential for visiting professors and exchanges, and indeed, when CONNECT sits down with Gayle, she has not long returned from an international trip to York University, Ontario which included discussions on new research partnerships and collaborations.

Gayle said: “Members of IHC and its embedded research centres are currently engaged in research and innovation activities with local, regional, national and international partners and we are actively supporting the development of the significance and impact of this work. Whether through pump-priming multidisciplinary research and innovation, or building partnerships around knowledge transfer, workforce development and services, there is great potential for IHC to become central to so much work across the lifecourse.”

It is a commitment that has already borne fruit in some key areas. For example, Professor Jocely Quinn, of CCCS, recently led an Economic and Social Research Council-funded event as part of its Festival of Social Science, which brought together young people, academics, community arts groups and public service practitioners, to explore some key questions around engaging the young in urban issues through methods such as creative film-making.

And the IHC has also led the development of research-focused modules that will be available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students across the institution from 2013/14. Gayle said: “As a University, we rightly pride ourselves upon the quality of our research-informed teaching, but we’ve been looking at new ways to set students on the research journey at an earlier level, and to inspire the next generation of scholar.”

With a new book just published, and jointly written with Professor John Scott, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research, and former Plymouth academic Professor Malcolm Williams, entitled Objectivity and Subjectivity in Social Research, 2013 promises to be quite a year for Gayle – and the institute.

“It is an exciting time, and the IHC is a genuinely inspirational project to be a part of,” Gayle said. “We’re taking an interdisciplinary perspective on enabling and empowering and transforming lives.”
When we talk about the potential for higher education to transform lives, there can be few more compelling examples than that of Martin Peniak.

Today, Martin is a post-doctoral researcher in robotics, whose expertise in artificial intelligence and parallel processing has helped create partnerships for the University with the European Space Agency and NVIDIA Corp. But rewind the clock eight years to his first night in Plymouth, and the contrast could hardly be greater.

Martin had travelled to Britain from his native Slovakia, accompanying his then girlfriend, who had secured work as an au pair in Plymouth.

“When we arrived in the city the family picked her up, and I was left on my own,” he recalls. “Later I was sleeping in the bus station, and someone came up to me and said that I should move on because a woman had been killed there not long before. I didn’t really speak English but I could understand enough! I moved off and as soon as it was morning I walked to the job centre and started applying for work.”

Martin landed a job in a fish processing factory and worked solidly for the next three months – no mean feat when you consider that he is a vegetarian. He established a foothold in the city, making his home in various youth hostels. But it was a chance meeting on his 20th birthday that would truly change his life forever.

“That man on the street was Professor Simon Davies, of the University’s School of Biomedical and Biological Sciences, and unbeknown to him, he had just planted a seed in Martin’s mind.

“I had been waiting for my girlfriend when I struck up a conversation with a man on the street,” he said. “We talked about astronomy and photography, and the man said that I should consider going to university.”

At first, I laughed because I had never intended to go to university. I did not like the educational system in my country because it is largely based on memorising texts rather than learning how to understand something and apply it in the real world.”

That man on the street was Professor Simon Davies, of the University’s School of Biomedical and Biological Sciences, and unbeknown to him, he had just planted a seed in Martin’s mind.

“I began to think that maybe I could study in the day and fund myself by working at night,” Martin continued. “So I went back to Slovakia to complete my civil service and started to learn English. I bought a voice...
recorder to help me improve, and applied to Plymouth University through the UCAS system.”

With a reference supplied by Professor Davies, Martin secured a place on the BSc (Hons) Computing degree and, true to his vision, began a demanding dual life, studying during the day, before rollerblading across the city to work in the fish processing plant until 3.00am. And just as astronomy had played a role in his path to university, so it shaped his journey through it. In his final-year undergraduate project Martin developed a program that simulated the artificial evolution of neural network controllers for Mars rovers. Working with Professor Angelo Cangelosi, he presented a paper at the ASTRA European Space Agency conference, and this led to an official collaboration for the University with ESA’s Advanced Concepts Team.

“I’ve always been interested in electronics and computing,” Martin said. “As a child I was always taking things apart to see how they work, and then putting them back together again. Working with Angelo, I began to develop an understanding of programming languages and physics engines, artificial intelligence and neural networks.”

Awarded the Revel Research Award for best student on the course, Martin was offered the opportunity to undertake a PhD in cognitive robotics, and so joined his mentor Professor Cangelosi on the Plymouth-led pan-European ITALK (Integration and Transfer of Action and Language Knowledge in Robots) project, working with iCub.

“Doing a PhD was an absolutely amazing experience,” Martin reflected. “I travelled to dozens of countries, met interesting people and did so much more besides.” He’s not kidding – an exceptional networker, Martin contacted NVIDIA, a global leader in visual and high-performance computing, and shared with them some of his research results attained with their graphics processing units. They were so impressed that they invited him to their Santa Clara headquarters so that he could present to them. This led to an internship for Martin this summer, and the establishment of an NVIDIA laboratory at Plymouth, which he now runs with fellow post-doctoral researcher Davide Marocco.

Martin said: “Single CPUs are hitting their limits, and not enough people are capable of moving to parallel processing. Thanks to NVIDIA, who donated some of the hardware and books, we now have a network of GPU-accelerated supercomputers at the University that we can use to teach people. We have established a new module on the syllabus, and it is very exciting to be able to teach students something that I love.”

Martin is also working on the Poeticon++ project, which takes forward the language acquisition research of iCub: quite a horizon for a young man who set out for Britain with a sideline in making drums and didgeridoos. And while he may no longer be with the same girlfriend, you’ll still find him skating across Plymouth in the morning.

“Networking, having opportunities to create and develop yourself, doing what I love and constantly trying to reach beyond the current horizons – I call it living a dream,” he said.
Picture the scene – you are standing in the middle of a giant dome as striking images and sounds reverberate all around you. Just a few hundred yards away, crowds cheer as one of the nation’s greatest Olympians, sailor Ben Ainslie, embarks on his ultimately successful quest for a fourth gold medal.

It sounds the stuff of fantasy, but for seven weeks this summer it was the reality for the University’s Innovation for the Creative and Cultural Industries (ICCI) team as their ICCI360 arena wowed crowds as part of the 2012 Cultural Olympiad.

As tens of thousands of people inspired Team GB and Paralympics GB to ever greater success in the Olympic and Paralympic sailing events in Weymouth, the ICCI360 arena captured their imagination as well.

In total, more than 26,000 people entered the dome, and its creators are already looking at how they can build on the summer’s success with a series of new ventures for 2013 and beyond.

“Being a lead element of the LOCOG 2012 Cultural Olympiad was arguably the largest external profile cultural event the University has been involved with in recent years,” said Martin Woolner, ICCI’s Director. “When we first began developing the arena, we knew the Olympics were coming – we knew we had to engage the public, and make the arena accessible to everyone.

“Looking back now, we can definitely say we achieved that and much more besides, and it has led to a whole range of opportunities that we believe will raise yet higher the University’s standing in this research area in years to come.”

During the Cultural Olympiad, the ICCI360 team collaborated with 320 individuals, 85 organisations and ran eight workshops for filmmakers, creative practitioners and organisations.

“The seven weeks of events in Weymouth provided an amazing opportunity for the University to collaborate with a broad spectrum of creative individuals and groups across a wide range of disciplines, and also to engage with established and new audiences,” said Dave Hotchkiss, Centre Manager at ICCI, which is part of the Faculty of Arts. “The feedback from those involved in the production and presentation of
“The Cultural Olympiad has given us a taste of the excitement and opportunities we can create, and we are now looking to build on that platform for the future.”

Martin Woolner
ICCI Director

art and performance works has been extremely positive, recognising the beneficial effect of their involvement in the project.”

No sooner had the excitement of the summer subsided than the ICCI360 team began work on its own Olympic legacy. A number of projects are developing as a direct result of its innovative research, with plans already in place for a presence at the BBC Big Bang UK Young Scientists and Engineers Fair 2013.

There are also collaborations with the proposed Dunbar Sealife Centre in Scotland, as well as projects with special schools in Shropshire investigating the benefits of immersive environments in an educational context.

Other projects could see the University partnering with internationally significant heritage organisations, and there are ongoing collaborations with Bristol University and David Glowacki’s 360 Danceroom Spectroscopy research. Further to that, work is also planned on the ICCI360 arena itself, to make it available for a wider range of events and organisations.

Martin said: “For this summer, we always knew we needed something to enable us to cater for large audiences, but moving forward our focus needs to adapt and change. We will be looking to make the arena more interactive, but also to develop it for smaller audiences as well. The Cultural Olympiad has given us a taste of the excitement and opportunities we can create, and we are now looking to build on that platform for the future.”

The team are now planning a major international 360 symposium for the summer of 2013 which will continue the ensure Plymouth’s position as a leading institution for 360 degree and immersive research.
UNIVERSITY HOSTS INTERNATIONAL RADIOACTIVITY CONFERENCE

With the devastation of Japan’s Fukushima-Daiichi power station disaster still fresh in the memory, the University staged an international conference looking at the issues surrounding environmental radioactivity. More than 80 researchers from 13 countries, including Japan, the US, Russia, and Canada, as well as representatives from industries, government and regulatory agencies, attended the symposium looking at ‘Implications for Human and Environmental Health’. Forty-seven presentations (including platform and poster presentations) contributed to a varied programme divided into different sessions which addressed topics such as low dose rate effects, DNA damage and repair, incidence of cancer around nuclear establishments and trans-generational effects with respect to the human health arena.

MILLION-PLUS MILESTONE FOR MOBY-DICK BIG READ

The Peninsula Arts-hosted ‘Moby-Dick Big Read’ has made a major splash with fans of Herman Melville’s 1851 novel, both old and new alike. The project, part of the inaugural Plymouth International Book Festival, was launched by actor Simon Callow in the graduation marquees on the Hoe in September, and by mid-November had registered more than one million listens.

Each of the book’s 136 chapters has been read by a different person – from community leaders to Prime Minister David Cameron – and the project is the brainchild of Dr Philip Hoare, Artist-in-Residence at the University’s Marine Institute, and artist Angela Cockayne. Commissioned and directed by

An open forum on ‘Postgraduate Initiatives in Radiobiology and Radioecology: Present and Future’ was also organised, in association with STAR (the Strategy for Allied Radioecology), which provided key insights into the needs of postgraduates in this field. Awadhesh Jha, Professor of Genetic Toxicology and Ecotoxicology, said: “For many of the delegates this was their first time in Plymouth, and the feedback was that they enjoyed it from both a scientific and social perspective. We held a welcome reception, tour and conference dinner at the National Marine Aquarium, and it was a great team effort from the organisers to celebrate 150th year of the institution. We have established some new links and enhanced the international profile of Plymouth in this field.”

Professor Awadhesh Jha (front, centre) with the delegates

Sarah Chapman, Director of Peninsula Arts, the website used to access the readings – SoundCloud – was developed by the University’s Institute of Digital Art and Technology (iDAT) (the recordings are also available through iTunes).

Sarah Chapman, Director of Peninsula Arts, said: “To reach the one million listener mark, less than half-way through the ‘big read’ is a fantastic achievement, and a testament to the way the public have embraced both Moby-Dick and the readings themselves. Among them have been thousands from overseas, which has ensured that the first ever Plymouth International Book Festival has genuinely lived up to its title.”

Simon Callow launches the Moby-Dick Big Read
**YOUNG MARINERS ‘TAKE THE HELM’ WITH NEW UNIVERSITY YACHT**

Students in the School of Marine Science and Engineering have been getting to grips with the new yacht *Take the Helm* this term as part of their education and training to become the navigating officers of tomorrow.

The 45-foot Dufour 445 vessel made its debut at the Southampton Boat Show in August, and sailed into Plymouth in time for the start of term, enabling undergraduates on the Navigation and Marine Science degree to undertake a number of modules in the waters around Plymouth.

*Take the Helm* is skippered by members of the teaching team, but student skippers are also being approved – and will play a key role in field work later in the academic year. It has also been on public display recently as part of the 150th birthday celebrations and as the ‘Committee Boat’ on the start/finish line for the BUCS National Sailing Championships, hosted at Mount Batten Watersports Centre.

Dr Andrew Eccleston, one of the regular skippers, said “She is a much bigger boat to handle than her predecessor *Fair Tide*, but this means that we can now give even more students the opportunity to develop their professional skills in navigation and leadership as they progress to a career in the marine industry.”

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**ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE – UNVEILING OF NEW ARTWORK FOR JAMES SQUARE**

As seen earlier in the magazine, the 150th anniversary celebrations have inspired a number of new features across the campus, including the stylish new building plaques, ten commemorative trees, and the sculpture called *Enterprise*. Ahead of the October celebrations, however, came *Arrival and Departure*, a granite sculpture conceived by artist Ian McChesney, and located in James Square, outside the Rolle Building.

Looking like a nautical bollard, the piece is a tribute to the many historic voyages that started and ended in Plymouth, and also marks the journey undertaken by students in both time and endeavour. And it was student Gemma Kempthorne who choreographed a special performance (pictured) in September, using *Arrival and Departure* as a stage.

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**JOHN SEALEY ‘BREAKING WAVES’ WITH LARS VON TRIER PROJECT**

Media Arts Lecturer Dr John Sealey has had one of his films selected as part of director Lars Von Trier’s new user-generated film project *Gesampt: Disaster 501 – What Happened to Man?* The four-screen installation is being shown at the Copenhagen Art Festival between 12 October – 30 December, and will then depart on an international tour. John, whose film *Albert’s Nemesis* (2012) was chosen, is one of only two film makers from the UK to be selected for this global project.

John said: “It is very exciting to be involved in a project which explores the ‘crowdsourcing’ process of making new work through collaboration.”

If you are to understand water...

Poetry by Caroline Carver, 2012

To touch new worlds through the resolution of water we ride waves of air and tides of sun and moon...

Without energy the sea’s an empty mirror motionless as stone

The sea speaks with the vocabulary of stone code-breakers are learning to decipher its words

Only scientists can pull truth from the sea they know without wind and tide water’s bone lazy

Unless the scientists create tides and currents water sleeps on lazy as a new-born

If you are to understand water you have to throw it about like a herd of galloping horses

When Icarus fell into the sea its surface was hard as stone

Water is so joyful when given waves again it leaps forwards it leaps up and down but like an obedient child it will not leap sideways

Navigation is more than a dot on the screen students like migrating birds read virtual lodestones on invisible charts oceans hide their contours in their pockets

Like Poseidon’s throne or a wise many-legged octopus a wave hub sits on the sea bed reading the traffic of the tides

Every beach draws a line between what is familiar and what lurks in that mysterious otherworld

The study of Marine Science is as broad as the ocean is wide after all it covers nearly three quarters of the planet

How did it take us so long to discover that our solid world is always rearranging itself as it slides tectonic plates in new directions like an astral jigsaw puzzle

Devonian limestone’s laden with fossils from its birth on the Equator even today stones of the future are growing under the seabed

In the Olympiad of the sea dolphins sharks whales gurnards seawrasse mackerel even the smallest fish on the reef swim like the finest athletes

The sea may pretend to sleep when it’s alone but underneath there’s a world in flux

Like the sea touching every coastline in the world

Plymouth University looks outwards a lighthouse of thought beamed to the four points of the compass

when a scientist is in a corner he can discover anything.