LIFESAVER UNMASKED
Sean’s double life as a hero at sea

ISLAND PARADISE
Student lands dream job for tycoon

HITTING NEW HEIGHTS
Sports teams smash record

ROYAL SEAL OF APPROVAL
Sharon’s ceremonial role at wedding of the year
Welcome

With the onset of rising tuition fees in 2012, students will be looking for universities to demonstrate even greater quality across the board in return for their investment.

With that in mind, this edition highlights some of the inspiring achievements of our current crop of students – be it academically, through extra-curricular activities or graduate recruitment – and demonstrates the benefits of studying at the University and the fantastic student experience on offer here.

Proof, if proof were needed, of our distinctiveness and the lure of University life here on the back of the sterling work of our academics and staff.

We also celebrate the work and achievements of employees at the University – from academics who are breaking the mould to a member of staff’s involvement in the Royal Wedding!

Get in touch if you have any story ideas – particularly in areas where the University is leading the way, doing something innovative, being recognised for best practice, or getting involved in something quirky!

I hope you enjoy this edition of UPfront – and welcome any feedback.

Richard Turner
Editor

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The University is committed to the promotion of equality and diversity. Our policies are available on the website: www.plymouth.ac.uk/equalopportunities.

“...I really admire how he has achieved so much, yet kept such strong values...”

Gemma Brill
A University student has landed her dream job working on a tropical island paradise for the ‘king of the entrepreneurs’.

She’ll be playing a key role to ensure that guests enjoy all the trappings of the high life when they visit Necker Island, owned by and home to tycoon Sir Richard Branson.

Gemma Brill beat dozens of hopefuls desperate to grab the opportunity of a lifetime and work as a watersports instructor at one of Branson’s flagship commercial operations.

She impressed his interview panel using the skills she learnt on her Applied Sports Science course – including marine enterprise and business management – at the University.

A typical day at the luxury Caribbean retreat will see Gemma collect new guests on a speedboat, teach watersports – such as wakeboarding, sailing and kitesurfing – during the daytime, and host those wining and dining on the island and on Branson’s 32-metre yacht in the evening.

Gemma, who takes up the permanent position in the summer as one of 60 fully trained staff members pander to guests’ every whim and fancy, said: “I have always dreamt of living on a desert island. I love teaching in general, but in particular watersports, so this job is pretty close to perfect for me.

“I have no doubt that I would not be in this position if it wasn’t for my course. My degree provided me with an all-round knowledge of a variety of sports. Without this, I wouldn’t have the necessary experience.”

Gemma’s delighted to be working for Branson’s empire and shares its strong values.

She said: “I really admire how he has achieved so much, yet kept such strong values around providing outstanding customer service and maintaining good relationships.

“I feel very proud to be working for someone who I share similar values with, in particular, supporting local communities.”

Gemma will be rubbing shoulders with the rich and famous while working on the island, which is popular with the likes of Prince Charles, Steven Spielberg, David and Victoria Beckham, and Harrison Ford.

She added: “To be in the position to meet people who have accomplished amazing things in their lives will add to the whole experience.”

And when Gemma isn’t working she’ll have the chance to enjoy the island’s gentle ocean breezes, incredible white sandy beaches and bright blue skies.

It’s hard work – but someone’s got to do it!

Key facts:
• Necker Island is located in the British Virgin Islands just north of Virgin Gorda
• Richard Branson brought the 74-acre island for around £180,000 in 1978
• the island has accommodation for 28 people and rents out at a reported US $47,000 a day.
But for the University’s Sean Marshall, a volunteer on Plymouth Lifeboat for the last 19 years, it’s a job he lives for, with the thrill and excitement involved in attending rescues and saving people’s lives.

When an SOS call comes in and Sean’s pager bleeps it’s often a step – or rather a voyage – into the unknown, with details sketchy as the drama unfolds.

Sean attends all kinds of callouts – from children blown out to sea on inflatable lilos to large ships sinking.

Sean is always on call and his life revolves around the RNLI, including the work he does as a full-time skipper and technician at the Diving and Marine Centre, because as soon as the pager bleeps, everything is put on hold to attend to the emergency.

He said: “The University is extremely supportive of the work I do for the RNLI – they know that I could be called away at any time. There could be times over the winter months where a couple of weeks go by without a call, but previously in the summer I have been called out 11 times in one day! I will always make the time back up, but I couldn’t be a volunteer without the support of my employer and my colleagues.”

Sean has achieved 2nd Coxswain status – the highest position possible for an RNLI volunteer – and been presented with two prestigious bravery awards for his work with the charity.

One of the most serious rescues Sean has been involved in happened in 2002, when a yacht carrying five people got caught in a crab pot rope in very bad weather. Without the efforts of Sean and his team there would almost certainly have been loss of life, and he was presented with the RNLI’s Bronze medal for Gallantry by The Duke of Kent.

Awards are rarely given out for this type of work – the last time a person was given an accolade of this kind in the South West was in 1978, when it was awarded to Sean’s father for his role in a 15-hour rescue to get a large trawler off rocks near Looe Island in storm force winds and blizzard conditions and then escort it to safety.

Sean said that both the University and the RNLI benefit from his dual roles as he is able to share best practice – for example, part of his role at the Diving and Marine Centre is to deliver maritime safety courses, from which he can draw upon his lifeboat experience.

**Key facts:**
- Sean has been involved in over 700 rescues
- his station received 120 calls last year – the busiest in its history
- the lifeboat covers from Burgh Island to the east of Plymouth to Looe in Cornwall – and 60 miles offshore.
PROFESSOR ANDY PHIPPEN is one of the country’s leading experts on social responsibility in computing. Here we put his work under the spotlight in the first of a series of question and answer sessions with some of our leading academic lights...

WHICH PIECE OF RESEARCH THAT YOU HAVE LED ON HAS HAD THE MOST IMPACT ON SOCIETY AND WHY?

My work on teenaged sexting – the distribution of indecent, generally self-generated images via mobile technology – has had the most impact in terms of both media coverage and policy. While the main piece of research was finished 18 months ago it is still receiving national coverage! With research such as this, when one is measuring a new phenomenon, it is important to get the debate into society because the grassroots – parents, teachers, the kids themselves – all need to be aware of the issues and what can be done. Given there have been links between sexting incidents and suicides in the US, it was clear we needed to generate awareness and a debate.

WHAT RESEARCH ARE YOU UNDERTAKING AT THE MOMENT?

I’m doing some work with the UK Safer Internet Centre on the abuse of education professionals via online technologies – moving away from ‘the internet is a nasty place and we need to protect kids’ to highlighting the fact that kids can be perpetrators as well as victims. There are some preliminary results in the public domain which have already provoked a lot of media and policy interest.

I am also doing something with Speechly Bircham, a large law firm in the City with one of the leading data protection lawyers in the country, looking at a large sample of young people and their attitudes toward data protection. This will feed directly into policy with the Information Commissioner’s Office, which sets and enforces data protection law in the UK.

WHAT’S THE MOST UNUSUAL PIECE OF RESEARCH THAT YOU HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN?

I’ve just had a student look at the ethics of the pornography industry, that was fairly quirky! It is interesting because it is one of the remaining taboo areas for research, yet has wide-ranging social and economic impacts. While the work is still being analysed, it does challenge some gender stereotypes about attitudes toward pornography.

WHAT PART OF YOUR TEACHING OR RESEARCH ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Difficult to pick a specific piece. Anything that I think is making an impact, whether that is research results creating debate in society, or a really good piece of student work which shows my teaching has got them thinking about their career and the social responsibilities they have, makes me proud. I once got chased down the hall at a graduation ceremony by a dad who wanted to thank me for everything I had done to help his daughter start what I think is a very high-flying career. That was a pretty proud moment!

HOW HAS DELIVERING THE COURSE CHANGED THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE BEEN ENHANCED?

It is interesting that the sort of work I do with kids and the internet feeds so nicely into my main teaching areas (IT and business ethics, current issues in management). What kids are doing online today will be what employees will be doing online at work a few years from now, when talking with management students there is a strong steer on change in the workplace and professional digital literacy. I also do some teaching for education students which looks at both their own practice and also the behaviours of kids in their care. I would hope the student experience is enhanced by grounding some of the theoretical work in these areas with research-informed teaching. Hopefully they can also see links with their own aspirations and the research I do.

WHAT CHALLENGES DO YOU FORESEE IN THE FUTURE IN YOUR DISCIPLINE?

The whole area is ceasing to be viewed as an IT issue and becoming more of a general social issue, which is very positive. While technology is a major aspect of the work, it cannot provide solutions on its own. A key challenge is to ensure that the debate is informed through an effective evidence base. When we talk about child protection online it can be such an impassioned discussion that everyone has strong opinions. However, a lot of those opinions are ill-informed and potentially harmful.

HOW HAS YOUR DISCIPLINE EVOLVED IN THE PAST DECADE?

My work is so cross-disciplinary now (IT, management, law, education, social policy, public health...) that I think what might be better to say is that it didn’t exist ten years ago!

WHAT INNOVATIVE TEACHING METHODS HAVE YOU/DO YOU PLAN TO USE TO ENHANCE THE STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE?

Well, harvesting postings and images from Facebook about the class prior to delivering a class is always a great way of focussing their minds on their own digital practises and professional behaviour! I don’t know how innovative it is, but I always try to contemporise anything we are looking at so there is something for students to relate to. Machiavelli wrote stuff 500 years ago which is hugely relevant to government and business practices today. In terms of enhancing the student learning experience, I always try to get guest speakers coming in to talk about their own work and what they look for in graduates, as well as working with dissertation students to build their own networks.
It has been another jam-packed term...here are some of the edited highlights as captured by our photographer Lloyd Russell.

The University has launched a new partnership with Santander who are giving us £50,000 a year for three years to benefit students through scholarships, languages support, student experience visits to overseas universities, entrepreneurship and employability.

Members of the University’s Hindu Society were joined by other faiths to mark the start of spring by throwing bright powders at each other to symbolise the beauty of the colours of mother-nature.

The University’s postal team – which sorts over 55 million tonnes of mail a year – has received a gold-standard international accreditation for its first class service. They underwent a thorough audit of the processes, procedures and people that deal with internal and external mail to gain the Postal and Logistics Consulting Worldwide award.

The University has launched a new partnership with Santander who are giving us £50,000 a year for three years to benefit students through scholarships, languages support, student experience visits to overseas universities, entrepreneurship and employability.
Daredevils had an adrenaline rush when they competed at a downhill urban mountain biking event on campus. They reached speeds of up to 25mph negotiating tough obstacle courses – including tight corners, steep descents and challenging terrain like steps and ramps – as quickly as possible.

The University has proved it’s on the right track by having a high-speed train named in its honour. The First Great Western train will be a vital link for rail passengers in the South West and beyond.

Intellectual Property Minister Baroness Wilcox visited the University to see how we are helping to lead economic growth and development. The Parliamentary Secretary for Business, Innovation and Skills went on board the University’s research vessel Falcon Spirit, where she met members of the Marine Institute to find out how its research is being applied to the growing renewable energy sector in the South West.

The University has proved it’s on the right track by having a high-speed train named in its honour. The First Great Western train will be a vital link for rail passengers in the South West and beyond.
Richard Pearne said that the Employer Mentoring Programme – which this year paired a record number of students with staff and members of the business community – should be replicated in other institutions across the country.

Richard graduated in 1993 with a degree in biology and IT – but had his career path catastrophically interrupted after he suffered serious multiple injuries in an accident with a heavy garage door at work.

Seventeen operations later, Richard has had to learn to walk and talk again. But that has not stopped him from building two successful businesses – one of which he has recently sold – and championing disability rights through his employment principles.

He said: “I wanted to give something back to the University that launched me into the world of science and discovery – and this type of programme offers essential advice to students with disabilities; they should run them at every university.

“And I feel I have got so much out of it as well – my mentee was truly inspirational.”

Sarah Facy, from the Employer Liaison Team within the Careers and Employability Service, said that was typical of many who had experienced the programme since it was launched in 2007. She said: “People sign up because they want to help students without realising that they develop themselves in the process.”

Over 30 students worked with mentors this year covering a range of topics and activities, from sharing advice and experience, to working on CVs and interview techniques.

One of those who took part in this year’s scheme was Creative Writing student Rachel Nafzger, who wanted to explore the possibilities of working in journalism or teaching. She said: “It provided a great opportunity for me to gain a more realistic, in-depth insight into a possible career choice by hearing experiences from someone employed directly in that field of work.

“I found that my confidence as a disabled student seeking employment grew massively. I would advise anyone considering the mentoring scheme to go for it as it is an invaluable experience in which you will gain a lot of knowledge and insight. Approach it with confidence and an open mind.”

Anyone interested in taking part in the Employer Mentoring Programme should visit the University website or contact mentoring.careers@plymouth.ac.uk.
As a Chief Petty Officer in the Royal Naval Reserve, Sharon Cummins was part of the path-lining party of military personnel who lined the way from the Great West Door at the Abbey to the awaiting carriages.

Of the hundreds of naval personnel taking part in the wedding, she was one of just eight people to form the naval contingent to perform the duty – and the only woman.

Sharon, a former graduate from the University, who now works as an ARC Project Implementation Manager for the Faculty of Health, said: “I was truly honoured, humbled and privileged to be selected for such a once in a lifetime event. I am very much a Royalist, so if I hadn’t been taking part, I’d have been glued to the television watching it!”

Sharon spent hours practising her drill training for the big day and, of course, had to make sure she was immaculately turned out in her military uniform. Such was the meticulous planning and attention to detail, she had to go through two stages of uniform inspection by military bigwigs to ensure she was suitable to take part in the glittering ceremony.

She thought that it was a fairytale wedding and said that the Royal couple would be excellent ambassadors for Britain. “It is touching to see a couple so well matched and obviously devoted to each other. I think they conduct themselves impeccably,” said Sharon.

As a Communications and Information Systems specialist in the Navy she has to establish and maintain radio communications/IT links between submarines, ships and shore-based headquarters.

Sharon has served for 21 years in both full time Navy and Reservist roles in support of operations and exercises throughout the UK and overseas – and is grateful for the help the University has given her to perform her duties.

Sharon said: “A reservist needs the support of a good employer and family to be effective in the role – and I am lucky to have both.” Indeed, the skills and experience Sharon has gained at the University and as a Naval Reservist is transferable between the two roles.

Sharon added: “In addition to problem-solving, and organising complicated events and processes, I have undertaken regular leadership and management training with the Navy which has equipped me well for management roles within the University.

“In return, working at the University enables me to meet a variety of people from all walks of life, such as through community engagement initiatives, thus giving me a broader base of experience from which to draw from when I’m dealing with people.”
A major University programme has kickstarted hundreds of individuals and businesses in the region during these tough economic times.

**LIFELINE FOR BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS WHEN THEY NEEDED IT MOST**

The project targeted final-year students, recent graduates, and managers and professionals at risk or job seeking, along with businesses which were vulnerable or positioning for the economic upturn.

Led by Research and Innovation, the project created opportunities for the University to proactively offer support through the economically difficult times after it secured £425K in matched funding through the government’s Economic Challenge Investment Fund (ECIF).

Sally Sharpe, ECIF Project Manager at the University, said: “Through this fund the University has helped almost 1,900 individuals and 950 businesses through access to its services, facilities and expertise.

“The additionality of awarding Enterprise Vouchers to the tune of £419K has provided careers support, continuing professional development, rental for pre-incubation space on campus, and access to facilities, services and consultancy, at a time when many would simply be unable to invest.”

The ECIF Team also established the LINK facility which enables the business community to ‘drop in’ and discuss their needs face-to-face with dedicated University staff.

LINK also provides business networking space and meeting rooms which can be accessed by University colleagues, partner organisations and businesses.

And it houses Formation2.0, the new pre-incubation space for entrepreneurs in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics sectors.

Through ECIF funding, the University launched the Sell2Plymouth portal, a one-stop shop online database where small to medium sized enterprises can access public sector procurement contract opportunities.

To underpin delivery of the ECIF Project and to ensure sustainability for the University’s future business engagement strategy, investment was made to demonstrate that the enterprise university is very much open.

Emma Hewitt, Head of Knowledge Transfer at the University, said: “A critical success factor was to make it easy for individuals, businesses and the community to access the University and to ensure that all the support available was clearly communicated.

“To respond to these challenges, the Enterprise Solutions brand was launched, which aims to join up and promote coherently all the different ways the University can help, irrespective of how we are organised internally. We have also established a clear entry in through the Enterprise Solutions Service and LINK which provides an information, diagnostic and matching service for enquiries whether on the telephone, via email or face-to-face.”

**What they said:**

“The support we have received in Formation Zone has allowed us to focus more attention on developing our own unique IP and divert some time and resource to exploring new projects and ideas. Finding that the University is so keen to support new and developing businesses through its pre-incubation space has been great, especially as a start-up business it can often be difficult to find and qualify for assistance,” said Alex Ryley, one of five University graduates who formed Mutant Labs, which specialises in unique interactive projects, iPhone development, flash development and web design.

“We approached the University to organise several events, including our community celebration. Using the funding we received we hired a hall and technical support. The advertising campaign was extensive and created awareness of the events and the organisation, which is essential for our future. We couldn’t have done any of this without the support of the University,” said Christian Kayembe, of the Betwabu Association, a social enterprise providing African people living in Plymouth with a forum to access support and increase their own development and employability.

“The University’s incubation space has provided a low-cost platform from which to launch our new business. We are grateful for the access to expertise and additional resources. The supportive and collaborative working environment at the University is a great start for any new business,” said Barbara Lees, founder of Fosi, a skiwear company.
A student impressed the designers of the Blackberry, Research In Motion (RIM), so much on his placement year that he became one of just five recipients of a prestigious global scholarship.

Gus Palmer, a final-year Computer Informatics student, received the scholarship in recognition of his recent work with the company – such as ensuring Blackberry’s new hardware and software programmes were compatible with the technology of different mobile phone network providers.

He said: “RIM has a huge student programme and there are hundreds of interns globally, so to win one of the five scholarships they gave out this year is amazing – I’m pretty stunned.

“I am very proud and delighted that my work has been so well received.”

Gus also got to the latter stages of the first Universities Brightest Business Brain competition recently, beating hundreds of hopefuls to reach the final of a competition which tested competencies such as teamwork, leadership and communication.

Meanwhile, a team of students from the University has just won a month’s paid internship with Microsoft’s in-house marketing team after triumphing in the first national competition of its kind in this country.

Final-year Business Studies students Lucy Hinchcliffe, Jennifer White, Lorna Whitby-Smith and Gillian Horsely impressed a judging panel of Microsoft executives with their innovative marketing campaign targeting the UK student market with the new Windows Phone 7.

Their integrated marketing campaign used online and social media channels and focussed on the idea that students could be part of a community. The campaign provided a choice of six student groups, each with their own host Xbox avatars.

Once the students have made their lifestyle choice, they gain access to a wide range of benefits tailored to their needs and behaviours such as music apps or sports updates.

Lucy said: “The judges loved our innovative marketing campaign and how professional we were – even commenting that our submission and presentation was better than most marketing agencies.

“But give students a challenge and the opportunity to work with a global brand like Microsoft and we will do anything!”

“The competition gave us first-hand experience in considering real business issues such as feasibility, risks and costs.

“This is the first year it has taken place in the UK, so to be the first ever winners is a real accolade.”

They beat six other teams in the Microsoft Protege Grand Final and also picked up a Windows Phone 7 each for their efforts.

Marc Lintern, Head of Employability at the University, said: “These are great examples of the type of enterprising Plymouth students that we are trying to encourage.”
An academic at the University will be braving snakes, cockroaches and mosquitoes and living in basic living conditions in Kenya to work alongside teachers there to educate local children.

While many staff at the University will be enjoying a well-earned rest over summer before the start of the next academic year, Polly Magne, an Educational Developer, will be carrying out voluntary work and teaching youngsters to help them develop skills and take control of their lives so they can support themselves and make a living in an unforgiving environment.

Polly admits that she doesn’t quite know what she has let herself in for – but thinks it will be a great experience.

She’ll be spending two weeks working with fellow teachers at a secondary school on the outskirts of Misikhu, near Kenya’s Western border with Uganda.

The school has around 350 students, with up to 60 in a class, varying in ages from 12 to 23.

Polly said: “The students have to pay to go to secondary school, and in these rural areas money can be tight, particularly for those who have been orphaned by AIDS and are busy trying to look after themselves. Some students will turn up for a term and then disappear for a while to earn some more money, before they can return for the next instalment of their education.

“I’ll be learning a lot about the education system in Kenya and may discuss alternative approaches with colleagues if they are interested – but you have to build trust before you can start to challenge approaches and discuss alternatives.”

Polly has topped up on jabs to prevent diseases like cholera and packed her rucksack full to bursting point with essentials such as anti-malarials, water purification tablets, mosquito nets, toilet rolls, batteries and a torch.

“The torch is a vital bit of kit – the more light, the fewer the cockroaches!” quipped Polly, who is undertaking this work in collaboration with Widows and Orphans in Rural Kenya (WORK).

Away from the classroom, she is looking forward to immersing herself in the country’s culture – particularly joining in with African singing, cooking and sampling local dishes, and going on safari if time allows.
It has forged a partnership with key figures across the city to launch a sustainable food initiative.

The Plymouth Food Charter was established to make people realise that food can have a positive effect on a wide range of areas other than just to stave off hunger pangs.

The Soil Association and The Barefoot Partnership Ltd, together with the University, Plymouth City Council and the NHS, formed the Plymouth Food Forum with many other local organisations, aimed at promoting positive change through food.

Jenny Bushrod, Director of the Office of Procurement and Sustainability at the University, said: “Food can be one of the most powerful drivers of positive social, economic and environmental changes. It is a key element to improving peoples’ lives as well as protecting the planet.”

The group has been looking at a number of key areas including the local economy, health and wellbeing, communities, lifelong learning and a reduced eco footprint.

She said: “The success of the food charter will depend on the support of individuals and institutions across the city. We want as many people as possible to sign up to it to help us make it work for everyone.”

The University has since added its own ingredient to the mix by setting up a Sustainable Food Policy.

As part of its pledge to the charter, the policy supports local suppliers and where possible Fairtrade products.

Jenny added: “Global warming will have a dramatic affect on food security, but the University and the wider city is following innovative projects in other parts of the UK and across the world who have already established food charters.”

“We want as many people as possible to sign up to it to help us make it work for everyone...”

The University has also been recognised for encouraging staff and students to make ethical choices when buying food and drink by having its Fairtrade status re-accredited.

The Fairtrade Universities and Colleges initiative ensures that producers of foods and goods are given a fair price for their work to reduce poverty and encourage sustainable development.
Streamlined staff at the University have chucked out their old clothes and folded up the measuring tape after shedding the pounds during a weight-loss challenge.

Those who took part lost a combined weight of around 16 stone after following a gruelling fitness regime and healthy diet. That, we're reliably informed, is the equivalent of 270 Double Whoppers with cheese, 102 bags of sugar, or 1,017 bars of Dairy Milk. Food for thought...

They were helped every step of the way thanks to the expert guidance of the University's Recreation Team, who provided nutritional advice, monitored participants' diets and encouraged teams to get active by taking part in sports such as badminton and table tennis during their lunch breaks.

Teams from Widening Participation/Science and Technology, Estates, Marketing and Recreation locked horns at a weekly weigh-in to see which department had lost the most weight in a challenge which ran from Christmas – when people are prone to Festive excess and indulging in those tasty treats – to Spring.

The winning team, with a combined weight loss of just over six stone, was Widening Participation/Science and Technology. Team captain Helen Smith said: “We have collectively lost over five per cent of our combined body weight, which is a fantastic achievement that we are all very proud of. “We have made a pact to continue to motivate each other and weigh-in together once a week to keep the momentum going and to achieve our ideal weight. We’ve not only lost weight, but we look and feel better too.”

Helen admitted that there had been times when they nearly fell off the wagon.

“...we’ve made a pact to motivate each other and weigh-in once a week...”

When our enthusiasm for the Weight Loss Challenge faltered after the first few weeks, we realised we needed to motivate each other and pull together as a team to all lose the weight that we wanted to.

“We have really changed our eating habits – we have now stopped bringing cakes and biscuits into the office, and we have also all increased our activity during the week. “For some of us this has meant anything from more long walks at the weekend to taking up Zumba classes at the University gym!”

Mark Cox, Health and Fitness Manager at the University, said: “I’m really proud of all the participants for the hard work they have put in. The team spirit demonstrated by all teams has been excellent. “Part of Recreation’s task now is to continue encouraging all the teams to keep up the challenge and maintain or lose more weight.”
A University student is riding on the crest of a wave after beating some of the biggest names in the body boarding scene to land a coveted national prize.

David Speller is leading the British Body Board Tour after winning the first event of the series at Portrush in Northern Ireland. He beat 15 other competitors and bagged 500 ranking points for the tour in the process.

And, if his rich vein of form continues, he'll be rewarded with a wildcard entry into the IBA world tour.

That'll see him tackling enormous waves in far flung exotic destinations like Hawaii, where the surf is consistently big and challenging.

"Although it will be a hard task for me to keep my first place ranking on the tour during the year, I think it's achievable, and I will go well out of my way to make sure I win!" said David, who has been body boarding for five years.

And when someone's motivated enough to get up by 6am on a cold winter's morning to drive two hours to practise in freezing conditions, who'd bet against him?

David, a first year Sociology student, trains for several hours a week and as a Sports Scholar gets financial help from the University with costs towards entering and travelling to competitions, as well as free gym membership.

He impressed the eagle-eyed judges at Portrush by performing combinations of rolls and spins on a single wave. The judges also took into account wave selection and the amount of risk he put into the surfing.

Due to the poor swell at the event, the waves were only waist high and didn't allow the competitors to make any big manoeuvres.

But when the waves are big, David says few things compare to the adrenaline rush and the enjoyment it provides.

He said: "I think real body boarding is a mix of surfing and gymnastics. It's very different to what everyone thinks when they consider the stereotypical image of the sport — it's actually very technical and due to the nature of the vehicle you can ride the wave similarly to stand-up surfing; however, body boarding allows for later drops, big back flip airs and the craziest deepest barrels.

"...it has given me life experiences, new friends and teaches me respect for the ocean..."

“It has taken me all over the world and given me life experiences that I would have never gained if I didn’t do the sport, as well as making me new friends and teaching me respect for the ocean.”
It has been a record-breaking year for the University’s sports teams who have experienced more promotions than your average high street store.

Eight teams will be competing in higher leagues next year and, what’s more, they’ve all done it in style, winning their respective divisions this season.

The eight promoted teams are:
- Men’s Badminton 1st Team
- Men’s Football 1st Team
- Women’s Hockey 1st Team
- Women’s Hockey 2nd Team
- Netball 1st Team
- Men’s Rugby 1st Team
- Women’s Rugby 1st Team
- Men’s Waterpolo 1st Team

Together, they have smashed the previous highest number of promotions from University teams in a single season, which was four in 2007. In all, 17 different sports at the University enjoyed success in BUCS leagues and championships including fencing, athletics and clay pigeon shooting — with the women’s cross country cycling team winning gold in the cross country championships for the first time.

The Students’ Union’s Sports & Societies Department (USSD) is responsible for organising the University’s representational competitive teams and overseeing every student sports club and society.

Thomas Davidson, Vice President of USSD, said: “Our sports teams have continually improved and, more noticeably in recent years, have been competing and winning at national and international levels.

“This success is not limited to ‘traditional’ sports such as football or rugby, but encompasses a wide range of disciplines from wakeboarding to clay pigeon shooting and waterpolo.

“As we move forward, it is also vital that both the University and UPSU have a common set of objectives with regards to sport and this is reflected in the recent creation of a five-year Sports Strategy that will guide us to success in the future.”