THE BLUE MILE
The Marine Institute helps create a unique Plymouth celebration

OPEN HOUSE  Thousands flock to the campus in biggest ever event

WE LOVE LOOE  Students embrace social enterprise and Cornish resort!
Welcome

This edition of UPfront could quite easily have been given a strapline ‘Community special’. From Open House to Blue Mile, City Jigsaw Garden to mountain bike competitions on campus – the University has been very much at the heart of some major Plymouth events in recent months.

Of course, Graduation on the Hoe is arguably the most iconic link between City and institution, and our teams are currently gearing up for another spectacular week of ceremonies.

But there is so much good work being done across the faculties and directorates that often flies under the radar. Whether it is our Widening Participation teams engaging with schools and expanding horizons, academics like Dr Roy Lowry inspiring young minds, or student volunteers leading football coaching or book-publishing projects – it is fair to say that the University really does make a difference in society. And how many organisations can truthfully make that claim?

With the opening of the Plymouth Marine Academy, the launch of the Community Research Awards, and the establishment of the Vice-Chancellor’s Enterprise Awards, the bond between University and region looks set to grow stronger still.

And UPfront will be there to chronicle it every step of the way.

Andrew Merrington
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.
As 8,000 people swept down to the Barbican on a (mainly) sunny weekend in July, three times round-the-world-sailor, and University of Plymouth alumnus, Conrad Humphreys was left to reflect upon another remarkable journey.

With no map to follow, and little funding at the outset, Conrad had to work prodigiously to get things moving, and engaged the support of the University of Plymouth and other community partners to help build the event. The result was, by common consent, a huge success.

Conrad told Upfront:

“It was an amazing feeling to see this area of the City transformed... and I was humbled by the blue milers — we had people aged from seven to 82 taking part.”

People swam, kayaked and paddle boarded the one mile course on the Saturday, and got to experience lots of activities in the taster sessions on Sunday. There was also a special showing of the documentary End of the Line, and plenty of stalls in the event marquee.

“We have created something which we can build on,” said Conrad. “We have a solid base to take this to the next level — I’d like to think we could build in a film festival, a conference and inspire even greater participation.”

Professor Martin Attrill, Director of the Marine Institute, was another man with plenty to smile about at Blue Mile. For not only did the University stand attract hundreds of people — all keen to get their hands on robots, ship simulators and diving masks — but he was able to look out towards the pontoon and see the new research vessel, the RV Falcon Spirit, moored there.

The institute’s 14-metre catamaran had a special naming ceremony, concluded by Vice-Chancellor Professor Wendy Purcell showering it with champagne — a more environmentally friendly gesture than shattering the bottle against its hull!

The vessel, named after legendary explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott, will be used for research projects, such as supporting the work at Wave Hub in Cornwall. Professor Attrill said: “It is absolutely fantastic to be a part of this day, and a perfect opportunity to engage people with the blue environment through sport and research.

“And the RV Falcon Spirit is a great vessel, we’re really pleased with it — it is going to take the University to a new level.”
There were sea monsters and surfers, paper galleons and pipe bands, and a few morris men and belly dancers thrown in for good measure. Oh, and not forgetting some 2,500 people, all enjoying the sights and sounds at the University of Plymouth.

The occasion was no less than three events rolled into one, as this year’s Open House was joined by the Lord Mayor’s Parade and the unveiling of the City Jigsaw Garden. They combined to create a carnival atmosphere as the Roland Levinsky Building became the epicentre of one of the biggest days in the City’s calendar.

It began with the opening of the City Jigsaw Garden and a symbolic act of the partnership approach that has been fostered in Plymouth, as Cllr Mary Aspinall, the first female Lord Mayor this century, laid the final piece of turf in the garden with Vice-Chancellor Professor Wendy Purcell.

As reported in the last edition of UpFront, the garden is a joint project between the University and a number of partners, including Groundwork South West, the site owner Kandahar, Marks and Spencer and the City Development Company.

A number of students, academics and volunteers have also been supporting the project, which is set to provide a cultural and sustainable green space in the heart of the City. (To keep up to date on its development visit: www.plymouth.ac.uk/cityjigsawgarden.)

After a fanfare from the Plymouth Pipe Band, Professor Purcell welcomed the Lord Mayor and other VIPs onto campus where the Mayflower Chorus greeted them with song. A reception event followed before all eyes turned to the campus and Open House.

“I would describe it as a riot of colour and sound!” said Active in Communities Co-ordinator Sarah O’Leary. “The Roland Levinsky Building and Glanville Street were transformed with the carnival spirit and our partners at the Plymouth City Council were delighted – already we have begun planning our collaboration again for next year – and the Lord Mayor has written to us thanking our superb team for all its efforts.”
The Plymouth Morris Men encouraged a number of people to join them, including staff volunteer Heather Martin, who only later discovered she had just participated in a fertility dance. Ruby Azar and the Chakra Bellydance troupe also took to the stage with a number of guests trying out some Turkish choreography.

A surf simulator in the Crosspoint proved to be one of the most popular activities and was ably manned by Dan Nicol, a final year BEd Primary Science student. He said: “There were so many activities to take part in and I was amazed at the numbers of people who came. It was really well organised and we all worked together – it was a privilege to be involved.”

A 15-centimetre tall bioloid robot enthralled the young and the not-so young alike with a demonstration of football and dancing skills. There was tassel-making and storytelling from the Racial Equality Council; arts and crafts from Plymouth Guild; music from the Real Steel Band; and tapas-style treats from award-winning chef Ross Tregidgo. The World Cup Bid Book made an appearance with the University Recreation Team and displays of maritime engineering complemented the overall theme of celebrating the City’s seafaring heritage.

Sarah added: “Only through partnership is this kind of major event possible, and I can’t thank everyone enough for making it such a success. Local people could see that this is their City university, even though they may not be studying here, and staff brought their families in to show them where they worked.

“In celebration of the City’s Cultural Quarter we worked with the City Museum to create a lively location, while our fantastic team of staff and students were engaging, enthusiastic, warm and welcoming, helping to create an exciting buzz that could be felt in every area.”

If anyone wishes to get involved with next year’s event contact activeincommunities@plymouth.ac.uk.
What does excellent leadership look like? What kind of leadership does the enterprise university need? And how do we place enterprise at the heart of leadership development opportunities and build collective strength? These are just some of the questions behind the design of the University’s leadership development initiative.

ENTERPRISE ENABLING LEADERSHIP

The Enterprise Enabling Leadership Development Programme started in January 2009 and has just passed a significant milestone with the first 150 people completing the programme in July 2010. Participants have included senior managers, programme leads and professional service managers, and they’ve experienced a mixture of taught modules, real-play sessions with actors and coaching, as well as some outdoor team exercises.

The programme places an emphasis on emotional intelligence and encourages people to develop their levels of self-awareness as a way of operating authentically in the most complex and challenging situations.

Helen Teague, Head of Organisational Development, said: “The exciting thing about the Enterprise Enabling Leadership Development Programme is that its delivery design is building new networks across work boundaries and equipping people with a common language and approach that enhances collective decision making and planning processes.

“The Organisational Development Team is being encouraged to think big and ahead of the sector and we are evidencing this in the way we are developing new tools and people management systems for our leaders as well as supporting their leadership skills development. We’re certainly not tinkering around the edges!”

A research study with SERIO is currently underway to fully evaluate the impact of the programme and to inform design for the programme’s next steps for 2010/11. This will include delivery of short, sharp Leadership Toolkit sessions, spotting and developing the ‘Leaders of Tomorrow’ as well as targeted master classes in skills areas for leaders that will enhance competitive advantage.

“For some organisations, what we have done so far would be seen as the whole programme,” said Helen. “For us it is just the launch pad.”
Professor David Wheeler took up his role as Dean of the Plymouth Business School, and Pro Vice-Chancellor, in January of this year. He began his career as a scientist, gaining a PhD in Microbiology and his early work focussed on the control of water pollution. After working on the top team of Body Shop International for seven years, David moved to Canada in 1999 as the first ever Chair of Business and Sustainability at the Schulich School of Business. His most recent post was as Dean of Management at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia. UPfront went to meet him to find out how he has settled into life back in England.

Did you expect to return to the UK?
Canada is a great country and I never expected to leave, but it is rare to find such an exciting job as the Dean of Business at a university which has a commitment to enterprise, sustainability and social engagement. It was an opportunity to work in an institution that believes in the same things that I stand for. I feel that I’ll be at home here and be able to make a difference.

What are your first impressions of the Business School and the University?
I’ve been blessed with a fantastic faculty and great colleagues. We all share a common vision that our role as educators is to equip our students to succeed in their careers in an increasingly unstable and unpredictable world. We are a very ‘can do’ faculty. Part of our differentiation here is focussing on entrepreneurialism and social enterprise, whereas other business schools have traditionally focussed on corporate businesses.

I think there is a tremendous team spirit in the leadership of the University, who all want to put Plymouth even more firmly on the map both nationally and internationally.

What is your reaction to the University being named as the UK’s top university in environmental performance in the People & Planet Green League?
This is a university that has a long history of commitment to sustainability issues, so this accolade is well deserved. I think that now the challenge is to retain our leadership position. The new Sustainability Research Institute will help keep us leading edge, not just nationally but globally.

For me, enterprise and sustainability are two sides of the same coin. Sustainability is about making the world a better place but you have to be entrepreneurial to create the new solutions.

Sustainability is now part of our DNA. This is something we know we are good at and we can succeed in doing.

What developments are in the pipeline?
The Mayflower 2020 project will involve us all in making much deeper contacts with New England. We have ten years to build some powerful iconic projects that reflect the future of discovery, not just the history.

The economic renaissance of Plymouth and the region is especially pressing. There is a lot to do to create 42,000 jobs in the city and entrepreneurship will be central to that. Economic growth is all about human capital: developing the young men and women who are going to be entrepreneurial, whether by starting their own business or by working for a small enterprise. By 2011/12 every business student at Plymouth will have an experiential learning opportunity around social enterprise or green business.

Can you tell us something about yourself that your colleagues may not know?
I drive an 800cc sports motorcycle which is currently being imported from Canada. However, I will find somewhere to live in the city centre so that I can walk to work; so the bike will be more of a recreational activity!
It has been another jam-packed term... here are some of the edited highlights as captured by our photographic team Lloyd Russell and Scott Ramsey.

Dr Richard Kirby, one of our Royal Society Research Fellows, hit the Big Screen in Plymouth with his outstanding photos of plankton – taken from his ‘Ocean Drifters’ exhibition at London Zoo.

‘Rocket Man’ Dr Roy Lowry warms his eyebrows with patented pyrotechnics in front of an audience of children and teachers at the University-hosted Salter’s Festival of Science.

Tracy Wilson, Christina Carr, Pippa Waller, Shiona and Richard Smedley running the University’s stand at the Royal Cornwall Show. Inset – Fiona McGuer (centre) and Sam Ainsworth (right) receive their intranet competition tickets from Andrew Merring.
Last edition we revealed the new name. This time around, TITCH, the robot formerly known as iCub, has grown up a little. The centrepiece of the iTALK project has just returned from Italy where he was fitted with a new ‘skin’.

The University has staged a couple of Question Time-style events in recent months – but the real deal rolled into RLB in June!
Screen Information Architecture – or SIA for short – was unveiled in June after a successful pilot phase and intelligently links up the LCD and plasma screens with local information and data from the University website.

Martin Walter, Principal Analyst/Programmer in the Web Team, said: “With SIA we can display information targeted to specific locations and the events or conferences that might be happening there. But it is also useful for those people who like to ‘graze’, catching their eye with information about the wider University as perhaps they walk through the Roland Levinsky Building.”

There are now some 20 screens coming online, and the owners of each can ‘subscribe’ to various feeds – such as UPSU or Science and Technology – in addition to receiving the standardised corporate news and events.

And SIA will also play a role in this year’s graduation ceremonies, something which has fed into the project’s development. Martin said: “An ethic of partnership has underpinned this endeavour, and it is quite amazing how this has taken off. We are working very closely with the Technical Services and the Graduation teams.”

And what about that Egyptian inspiration? “Sia was an Egyptian primeval goddess of knowledge and the mind,” Martin said. “That seemed fitting for a project that has taken many of the blank screens that we had around the University and used them to provide a wealth of information.”

Not content with showcasing all of this information, the team is also doing some very clever things with data, behind the scenes, thanks to another new project called UPmedia.

Now in its pilot phase, UPmedia is an intelligent archive system that is designed to take any University audio and video files and store them for use across all media.

“The beauty of UPmedia is that no matter what system you are using – whether it is the University website, the Intranet, a personal profile page or iTunesU – it is there in the background, taking the information and making it visible in other areas,” said Rebecca Lee, Web Editor.

In order to do this, UPmedia asks a couple of questions as to whether the file is private, or for University or public consumption. Then it does the rest!

The project is hooked into other developments – such as the Students’ Union radio and the webcam link at the site of the new marine building – and is expected to go live in July 2011.

One of the partners involved is the Television and Broadcast Services team. Dave Hurrell, Television and Broadcast Services Manager, said: “UPmedia is a very welcome development, enabling the University to use its media to best effect, while creating a rich archive of content to be repurposed across the web and other electronic communications. UPmedia will empower users, allowing them to make their media content available easily.”

If you would like more information on SIA or UPmedia, go to:

http://intranet.plymouth.ac.uk/web/sia or
http://intranet.plymouth.ac.uk/web/upmedia
CONFERENCE CALL

The University has staged some key conferences during the course of the academic year – covering topics as diverse as fast-track degrees, sustainability in design, and international shipping piracy. UPfront attended a couple of recent events which tackled key issues around teaching and learning – here is what we discovered.

INTERNATIONALISATION ON THE AGENDA

“Treat international students with greater hospitality or risk becoming the Bates Motel of Higher Education” was the advice from keynote speaker Professor Philip Dodd to Britain’s universities, at the Vice-Chancellor’s Teaching & Learning Conference in June.

Professor Dodd, Chairman of Made in China, said that unless universities started respecting the cultures of overseas students, then they’d risk losing them to global competitors and finding themselves “somewhere off the main road” in the marketplace.

Nearly 200 staff and external delegates attended the one-day conference, which was the first time it had been opened up to people outside of the University. The theme of Internationalising Higher Education – Where Next? addressed a number of key issues, such as the challenges and opportunities of operating in overseas markets, the experience of international students and staff in adjusting to life in the UK, and the importance of developing UK students into global citizens.

“We wanted to give University staff the opportunity to showcase the work they are doing in the internationalisation arena,” said Director of Teaching and Learning, Professor Brian Chalkley.

“It was also an opportunity to welcome others to contribute to the debate about how we improve the experience of international students.”

UNIVERSITY SHOWCASES ITS PROFESSIONAL PLACEMENT LEARNING EXCELLENCE

The Centre for Excellence in Professional Placement Learning (Cepll), one of the University’s CETLs, marked the end of its five-year funding with a major international conference of its own.

Staged in the Rolle Building, the Transforming Learners, Transforming Lives event provided a platform for national and international presenters from a wide range of disciplines including veterinary science, business, IT, social work, psychology and medicine.

A programme of presentations, workshops, discussion panels and networking opportunities kept the delegates busy, and enabled the University’s experts in Cepll to share the innovation, knowledge and practice in placement learning they have gained during its life-span.

Teresa Thorne, Project Manager, said: “It has been a tremendous team effort, with everyone working tirelessly to ensure this conference really made an impact. It is clear that the centre has had a considerable impact within professional placement learning, furthering the University’s reputation as a leader in the field.”

And it would seem that the delegates appreciated the work put in by the University. As one said: “Thank you so much for this great opportunity to disseminate the outcomes of our project work; and to meet and have interesting discussions with some lovely people who are clearly leaders in their field. I’d say it was the best conference in years!”
As these pictures show, life can be a real beach when you’re conducting research at the University of Plymouth!

Take Mark Davidson, Associate Professor, in the School of Marine Science and Engineering, for example, who was at the centre of a high profile investigation into the performance of Europe’s first artificial reef at Boscombe, in Dorset.

Mark was contracted by Bournemouth City Council to evaluate the reef, which called upon his 34-years worth of surfing experience, not to mention some considerable driving stamina as he often had to race to the beach at 5am to take advantage of favourable swells.

Mark used GPS technology to record each ride during the course of the six-month investigation, and found himself tracked with keen interest by the media.

“That’s why it was so important to get the science right. As a result of my report the contractors are planning modifications to the reef and I may be consulted to see if they improve the waves for surfers.”

Tim Poate, a third year PhD student in the Coastal Processes Research Group, has been spending his time in Cornwall, studying the beaches at Gwithian, Porthtowan, Perranporth and Chapel Porth as part of an evaluation into how the Wave Hub project might affect them.

“We’ve been undertaking monthly Real Time Kinematic GPS Surveys for 28 months now,” Tim said. “In addition we have wave data, tide data and ARGUS images available to us to try to understand the complex dynamics of this highly energetic macrotidal coastline.”

And yes, that really is a garden shed in the middle of an estuary – Bigbury and Bantham in South Devon to be precise – and for two weeks it was home to PhD student Saul Reynolds.

Saul, also part of the Coastal Processes Research Group, has been studying how sediment is transported during tide ranges, gathering field data that could shed light on the silting up of the Avon estuary.

“I’d be on the rig taking measurements for a period of around six hours during each high tide and then it was back to the tent for some food and rest,” he said. “It certainly beats two weeks in the office sitting at a computer!”
It was an election that provided high drama and intense public interest – and not a coalition in sight. We are talking, of course, about the vote for the new UPSU Sabbatical Team.

Records tumbled as more candidates stood and more students voted than ever before, and as the count reached its conclusion, Seena Shah was unanimously voted into office as the new UPSU President.

Seena, who graduated in International Relations (with Spanish) this summer, joined the SU last year as Ethics and Environment Officer, and says she is looking forward to the challenge ahead. “I’m excited and a little scared,” she told Upfront. “There is a great deal to learn but I love this University and the people here and I hope we can carry on the fantastic work done by Aleshia (Sampson) and her team.”

One of her first roles will be to oversee recruitment of a new CEO and to build on the governance work conducted by the outgoing team. “They have given us a great platform to work from – I want us to build on it and do some really exciting things,” she added.

With the handover period now complete, Aleshia is set to start a new chapter working in the Plymouth Business School. Reflecting on her tenure in office she said: “It has been an amazing experience. I’ve learned so many new skills and experienced things I could not have imagined – I’d encourage any student to get involved with the SU. And I’d like to thank everyone that has worked with us and helped to make this year such a success.”

NEW UPSU PRESIDENT TAKES OFFICE

The changing of the guard! Seena (left) and Aleshia (right).
Chris Bunce, Neil Higson, Darren Davis, Dave Kingwell, Simon Denham and Julian Gilbert decided to dispense with the trimmings and are now just plain trim after six months of healthy eating and exercise. “There were a few comments about tight shirts,” said a svelte Chris, “so some challenges were laid down and we decided to make a little competition of it!”

Amazingly the idea stuck once the festive alcohol had worn off, and spurred on by team rivalry, the six set about new diets and increased exercise. With Sheilagh Francis providing able admin support at the monthly weigh-in sessions, the competition captured the imagination of the directorate, and in the final weeks the challenge slimmed down to a neck-and-neck race between Neil and Dave.

“It’s been good fun and people have been very supportive – especially the team in Recreation,” said Neil.

“I am not sure we could have done it without them,” added Dave, who ultimately took first prize after losing almost two-and-a-half stone. “And it has also brought the team together on something other than work.”

The gang have pledged to continue their healthy regime and have lightened their wallets a little too – by donating £300 to a charity of Dave’s choice.

There have been many celebrated ‘recruits’ in the musical industry: Ronnie Wood to the Stones; Ringo Starr to The Beatles to name just two. Few, however, could boast the sense of serendipity to rival that of the University’s Dr Clare Pettinger when she was invited to lend her vocal talents to the soul funk outfit that is The Cuckoo Collective.

It began with a chance conversation on a train when Clare revealed to a fellow commuter that she had been in a band in Nottingham. Unbeknown to her, this travelled by word-of-mouth to the embryonic Cuckoo Collective – or the Funk Drops as they were known then – who were in need of a singer. Several weeks later, it came to pass that the creator of the group happened to be at a lecture given by Clare in the City.

Clare, Programme Lead in Publish Health Nutrition, said: “A man approached me when the lecture finished and asked if I was a singer. By sheer coincidence it turned out that he was a friend of the person I had spoken to on the train, and he’d worked out from the details he’d been given – a Scottish woman working in health at the University of Plymouth – who I was!”

Clare was invited to audition for the group, and after being accepted, she in turn recruited Professor Rudi Dallos, Programme Director in the School of Applied Psychosocial Sciences, on guitar.

The ten-piece line up is now juggling busy professional careers with writing songs, rehearsing, playing gigs and looking cool in moody black and white photographs.

Clare, whose mum was a professional singer, added: “We like to think of ourselves as the good-time, premier funky soul band in Plymouth – and our mission is to make people dance!”
Helen Greathead said the production behind We Love Looe was “unique” in bringing together the different teams and producing a book of such “commercial quality”.

Helen worked as a mentor to the three students who wrote, illustrated and published the book – Lottie Chase, Ollie Goodson and Danielle Woodbridge respectively – as well as undertaking editorial duties herself.

She told UPfront: “I really enjoyed working on this project. It is totally unique – I have not heard of anything like it in the country.

“It has been a fantastic learning experience for all of us, especially for the students because they had to put together someone of real commercial quality.”

The book was launched in May at separate events in both the University’s Gateway Facility and the Town Hall in the popular Cornish resort – and has already been attracting orders from a number of sellers including Waterstones.

Marc Lintern, Head of Student Development and Employability, came up with the idea and worked with Anne Tillett, Education and Training Manager at Groundwork South West to put the project team together.

The students all came through tough interviews and began working with the pupils in Looe, who helped research some salty seaside stories from the town’s rich archive.

Marc said: “It is a beautiful book and I am thrilled that this has come together so well – and that is a testament to the talent of Lottie, Ollie and Dani.

“We should be under no illusion – this was a really tough assignment, but they’ve done a fantastic job and the University can be proud of the result.”

It is hoped that this will be the first in a series of books – all to be published by the University of Plymouth Press – with profits from each being ploughed into the funding for the next. And the team has already confirmed that the next in the series will focus on the Tamar Valley Railway and will be produced in conjunction with Drake Primary School in Keyham, and the Devon and Cornwall Rail Partnership.

The commissioning editor behind the popular Horrible Histories series has lavished praise on the University’s partnership with charity Groundwork South West and Looe Community School following the launch of a new children’s book.

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Marc Lintern, Head of Student Development and Employability, came up with the idea and worked with Anne Tillett, Education and Training Manager at Groundwork South West to put the project team together.
When student Jon Catney suggested that the Plymouth campus would make a perfect downhill mountain bike course, you could have been forgiven for not sharing his vision.

But four months later Jon and his team transformed the fearsome steps outside the Nancy Astor Building and the Charles Seale Hayne Library into a thrilling obstacle course – and attracted some of the country’s best riders to put it to the test.

Over 100 people entered the Urban Downhill Charity Event, ranging from first-time riders to professionals. Each had two timed runs against the clock to cover the 250-metre course, with contestants being grouped into categories according to age.

Jon, who studies marine sports, said: “The event was a big success, I couldn’t have hoped for a better day. I would like to thank all of the sponsors, marshals and the University for letting me stage it – and the St John’s Ambulance, who thankfully did not have much to do except patch me up when I crashed!”

Dave Furniss, Sports and Recreation Development Manager, helped Jon liaise with the University. He said: “It was a spectacular day – as the photos show – and we had some great coverage in the local media. It is a tribute to Jon’s vision and enterprise that it proved so successful.”

If you are looking for a more peaceful form of relaxation, then Drake’s Place Gardens (next to Sherwell Church) might be the spot for you. The University is due to install new seating soon and is appealing for staff to come up with ideas on how to use the green space.

It is available to all, so if there is a community group who might benefit from using it – from tai chi to tea parties – please contact Paola Simoneschi at paola.simoneschi@plymouth.ac.uk, or via extension 88021.