Sharks go shopping

• BABY TALK
  Teaching robots to speak

• GOING GREENER
  Improved travel plan

• NEW ERA
  Meet the new Vice-Chancellor

• BOXING CLEVER
  From DIY to the lab
Welcome to the spring edition of UPfront

This edition includes an interview with our new Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Professor Wendy Purcell, as well as news from across the university.

If you have any ideas or contributions for future editions of the magazine, please email me at paola.simoneschi@plymouth.ac.uk

The copy deadline for the summer edition is 6 May 2008.

Paola Simoneschi
Editor

Front cover:
Sharks and other marine animals find food using a similar search pattern to the way people may shop, according to research led by Plymouth – see page 3 for details.

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email: das@plymouth.ac.uk

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

Welcome

National Science Week
Whizz Bang Wallop is the title of just one of the events that will have the campus buzzing during National Science Week (8 - 16 March).

The aim of all of these events, which range from Science with Bubbles to Why Are Volcanoes Dangerous? is to provide school pupils with an exciting vision of the world of science and technology and the opportunity to meet and interact with practicing scientists. The annual Great Egg Race will also be part of the fun!

Student greenhouse
A website designed to promote sustainability awareness and knowledge among students has been established by the Centre for Sustainable Futures (CSF).

The ‘student greenhouse’ will give students easy access to relevant information and encourage cross-curriculum thinking and social networking. In addition, users will be able to download podcasts of a variety of CSF lectures.

Staff are asked to encourage students to register on the site - http://csf.plymouth.ac.uk/greenhouse - as it provides an opportunity to find out about the issues students are concerned about, helps them to think ‘outside the box’ and will promote New Skills Plus principles.

All Our Futures
The organisers of the All Our Futures conference – which is due to take place at the university between 9 and 11 September – are calling for papers for the event, which is entitled Education Waking to Threat, Hope and Possibility and structured around four main issues of campus, curriculum, community and culture.

Keynote speakers confirmed for the conference include author and award-winning scholar David Orr, Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics at Oberlin College, Ohio, and Mark Lynas, one of the leading voices in the climate change debate in the UK.

The conference is being organised by the Centre for Sustainable Futures in association with the Higher Education Academy. For more information, visit http://csf.plymouth.ac.uk

Can the internet help save lives?
Faculty of Health & Social Work staff are part of a team that has secured £100,000 from the Department of Health to conduct ground-breaking research into helping young people who self-harm.

Researchers from the university, the Peninsula Medical School and Devon Partnership NHS Trust will explore the potential of online communities such as chat rooms to open up communication between self-harmers and health professionals.

The project will recruit people aged 16-25 who have self-harmed or have been affected by the issue, as well as students and recently qualified health professionals. This will be done through online routes such as YouthNet, national self-harm network bulletin boards and university websites.

New prospectus
The undergraduate prospectus 2009 has been published. Its prompt delivery means Plymouth is likely to be the first university to have its 2009 edition available at all the recruitment events held across the country.

According to the university’s New Entrants Survey, the prospectus remains one of the most useful sources of information for prospective students, with over 80% of new entrants making use of it.

To obtain a copy, contact prospectus@plymouth.ac.uk
The results of the international study* – which was led by Dr David Sims from the Marine Biological Association and the university and published in a recent edition of Nature (www.nature.com) - show that the animals’ behaviour seems to have evolved as a general ‘rule’ to search for sparsely distributed prey in the vast expanse of the ocean. This rule involves a special pattern of random movement known as a Levy walk, where the predators use a series of small motions interspersed with large jumps to new foraging locations. This increases the chance of finding food, however widely scattered it might be.

“Systematic searching is not the most efficient strategy if you’re looking for sparse items,” said Dr Sims. “If you go to the supermarket to buy eggs you look for them in one place, and if you don’t find them there you choose another location to look in. You probably won’t start at one end of the supermarket and search every aisle. Predators increase energy gain by adopting the Levy walk, so they can travel further to find food.”

The researchers analysed the dive data from sophisticated electronic tags attached to a diverse range of marine predators, including sharks, tuna, cod, sea turtles and penguins, in various locations around the world. They compared this data to the distribution patterns of their prey and found similarities, suggesting the predators have evolved this search rule to get the best possible results from their foraging expeditions.

Similar movement patterns appear to be present in other species’ behaviour, including human travel dynamics, hinting that the patterns discovered by the team may be universal. If so, they could prove useful for programming robots to be more successful when collecting samples from inhospitable places such as active volcanoes, the deep sea or on other planets. Understanding the patterns could also shed new light on how early humans explored and colonised the continents.

*The research was funded principally by the Natural Environment Research Council, Defra, the Royal Society and the Fisheries Society of the British Isles.
Baby talk

It may not gurgle cutely or have daddy’s dimples but the baby robot due to be delivered to the university will be the first in the UK.

A European consortium led by Plymouth beat stiff competition from 31 others to win a £4.7-million research grant for the ITALK (Integration and Transfer of Action and Language Knowledge in robots) project, which has recently got underway. The project – believed to be the first of its kind in the world – will see the iCub, as the robot is called, delivered to the university in March 2009.

Over the next four years robotics experts will work with language development specialists who research how parents teach children to talk. Their findings could lead to the development of humanoid robots which learn, think and talk.

Typical experiments with the robot will include activities such as inserting objects of various shapes into the corresponding holes in a box, serialising nested cups and stacking wooden blocks. The iCub will also be asked to name objects and actions so that it acquires basic phrases such as “robot puts stick on cube”.

“The outcome of the research will define the scientific and technological requirements for the design of humanoid robots able to develop complex behavioural, thinking and communication skills through individual and social learning,” said Angelo Cangelosi, Professor in Artificial Intelligence at the university.

To find out more about the iCub, visit www.robotcub.org

GOING GREENER

The university is becoming an increasingly familiar face on the ‘green scene’, as efforts are upped to reduce our carbon footprint.

Voted second greenest university by People & Planet last year, the university is working hard to build on this success for the good of staff, students and the environment. One of the most successful initiatives is the Green Travel Plan, which in partnership with Plymouth City Council (PPC) and local bus companies, offers employees discounted bus travel.

The university, unlike most other members, further subsidises the already reduced cost of the flexible pass for staff and the latest evidence suggests the scheme is having increasing success.

“How times have changed within the Department of Learning Facilities, which administers the scheme,” said the department’s Sarah Haywood. “Just over two years ago the majority of staff brought their cars on to the campus each day. Recently, when it was necessary to identify two staff members based in 16 – 24 Endsleigh Place who had a campus parking permit, only one could be found!”

PPC recently held a special re-launch event to attract more users to the scheme, and such is the take up by university staff that Matt Page, from Research & Innovation, was chosen as a media case study. He told BBC Spotlight: “The bus ride is relaxing and gives me time to chill out listening to the radio or reading. Driving in and parking while at work would cost roughly £8 per day, plus petrol. As we had two cars we decided to get rid of one, which reduced our outgoings even further – a saving of around £1, 600 a year.”

The bus ride is relaxing and gives me the chance to chill out

The university’s support for green travel and public transport use was also marked with an invitation to the birthday celebration of the First Park & Ride Services. A specially created birthday cake was handed out to passengers as a way of saying thank you for using the service, which has been a phenomenal success.

“The high quality and cleanliness of the fleet of buses, along with the regularity of the services, has been a hit with university staff,” said Sarah Haywood. “The university substantially subsidises staff use of Park & Ride and has recently seen sales of tickets for the services rocket.”

Information for staff can be found on the Green Travel and Car Parking community on the intranet.

*People & Planet is a national student action group campaigning on world poverty, human rights and the environment.
Meet the Vice-Chancellor

As a graduate of the university, returning to Plymouth has been a kind of homecoming for the new Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive, Professor Wendy Purcell (below), who joined the university last December.

Prior to her return to Plymouth – where she studied Biological Sciences in the mid 80s - Professor Purcell was Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Hertfordshire (UH). She took up this post after five years as Dean of Biological and Biomedical Sciences at the University of the West of England (UWE), a role she describes as ‘creative, influential and great fun’ and which she combined with that of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) in the last two years. Her previous posts include that of Principal Lecturer and Head of Division of Pharmacology & Physiology in the Faculty of Sciences at UH, the institution where she studied for her PhD in immunopharmacology and undertook postdoctoral research.

As a student here you probably never dreamt you’d one day return in the top job, or did you?
You’re right – back then, I had no idea what a VC was! Neither did I realise that I would follow a career in research. Growing up, my mother thought there were two respectable careers for girls, teaching or banking, so I thought I’d probably be a teacher. It was a summer job working for the National Blood Transfusion Service that ignited my passion for science – seeing science in action making a difference to people’s lives got me on the path to a science-based degree. It wasn’t until later that I moved to a management role.

What are your priorities for the university?
Plymouth doesn’t yet have the feel of being a university city and there’s a real need to develop the connection we have with our stakeholders here and in the wider region. It’s also vital that we take advantage of the huge opportunities for enterprise and internationalisation. Of course, I want to see the university continue to provide students with a high quality learning experience regardless of their background. They are making a big investment in their education and Plymouth must be a university of which they can feel proud. And I want to develop the influence we have in the sector – to develop our reputation as a leader not a follower.

Apart from your own talents and hard work, what has helped your career most?
I have worked with people who’ve helped me develop and encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone. I’ve always felt it’s important to seek out and listen to feedback too.

Finally, how would you spend your perfect day off?
Being beside the water helps me relax, especially watching a beautiful sunset, as does a bit of retail therapy!

Professor Purcell will be holding an open forum for staff at 1.15pm on 11 March in Theatre 1 of the Roland Levinsky Building. Extracts of her presentation and Q&A will be posted on the staff intranet. Questions can be sent in advance to vc@plymouth.ac.uk and – as long as they are not anonymous – she will answer some of these on the day as well as taking questions from the floor.
The idea behind the LabPlus project came to Senior Lecturer Dr Geoff Wigham in a ‘eureka!’ moment after he bought a Stanley organiser box to store all the nuts and bolts lying around his workshop at home.

The groundbreaking idea was developed in collaboration with colleagues and deemed so good it attracted an £850,000 funding package from the Higher Education Funding Council, leading to the creation of a purpose-built lab that gives students across all scientific disciplines the time and space to develop their practical and theoretical skills.

At the heart of LabPlus are the Stanley organiser boxes, which are used to create unique scientific projects that can be connected to a field trip, a lab-based experiment or a practical demonstration – anything a student may find useful in their degree studies.

More than 20 boxes have been developed so far, including one on minerals, another explaining how to measure rock dimensions for river flow studies and one on historic maps.

At the moment, academic staff suggest ideas for the boxes before there is a set consultation process, but in the future students will be encouraged to come up with their own suggestions.

“A certain amount of thanks for the creation of LabPlus has to go to my wife for pointing out the benefits of tidying up the workshop at home,” said marine biologist Dr Wigham. “I’d been thinking about how we could provide students with a resource centre that wasn’t governed by timetables, but gave them the time and space to work and study and had easily accessible resources, like a library or an artist’s studio.

I suddenly realised how these storage boxes could be an integral part of our resource...”

Inspiration

“I suddenly realised how these storage boxes could be an integral part of such a resource and, as I think we have proved, you can get as much information and inspiration from a carefully packaged display box as you can from conventional lab-based practical exercises.”

“LabPlus is a multi-disciplinary learning space that is putting Plymouth at the cutting-edge of lab facilities and could be used as a blueprint for transforming scientific study at all levels of education” said Dr Ruth Weaver, Director of the Experiential Learning CETL.

Accessing the boxes couldn’t be easier. They are all stored in LabPlus and booked out by students in the same way as borrowing a book from a library. All the boxes are logged on a database that can be accessed by the students via the university’s existing library computer system.

As well as the learning packages being available online, students can access additional material associated with a specific box subject to broaden their studies still further.
A t the brand new LabPlus facility, students and parents were greeted by Head of the Centre for Chemical Sciences, Professor Steve Rowland, who donned full academic gown and mortar board for the occasion. Students then had the opportunity to conduct a typical undergraduate first-year chemical experiment – faced with a fictitious but realistic scenario, they were asked to determine the concentration of vitamin C in peppers by comparing the effects of microwave cooking and baking. Professor Rowland said there was a canny reason behind the experiment choice. “It reflected the hands-on flavour of teaching which has made Plymouth chemistry graduates so employable,” he said. “Events like this help prospective students to make up their minds in an informed and fun way about where to study chemistry at university.”

Bristol school pupil Rebecca Bristow said, “It was a great day and gave me a real insight into what is expected at undergraduate level,” while Giles Strong, who travelled down from Poole in Dorset, commented, “It was well worth the early start from home – the staff were really friendly and helpful.”

Budding scientists got a flavour of higher education at a recent chemistry taster day on campus.

Making a difference

St udents with disabilities have been benefiting from a mentoring programme launched by the Careers Service last October. The programme has seen ten students mentored by staff from organisations including Plymouth City Council, Plymouth Music Zone and Bond Pearce solicitors as well as the university. This has helped them gain an overview of specific sectors and get guidance on job-hunting techniques, CVs and skills sought by employers.

The students’ feedback has reflected their positive experience, with typical comments including “I now feel more confident to approach employers” and “I’ve found things out about a job that I don’t think you can get from a website”.

Anyone interested becoming a mentor from this September is welcome to attend the celebratory event marking the end of this year’s programme. It will take place in the Smeaton Building from 4.30 to 6pm on 9 April. The Careers Service is also keen to hear from students wanting a mentor.

For further information on the event or taking part in the programme, contact Kate Colechin, Careers Adviser, on x32262/email: kate.colechin@plymouth.ac.uk
Focus on employability

One of the principal features of the Plymouth student experience is our emphasis on preparing graduates for professional life, as encapsulated in the university’s recently revised Skills Plus policy.

The right route

The university is to play a key role in a new drive to encourage more youngsters to study foreign languages in a bid to help British students compete with those in other European countries.

Plymouth is part of a newly established South West consortium of academic institutions taking part in the Routes into Languages project, which is being jointly funded by the Higher Education Funding Council and the Department of Children, Schools and Families.

The aim of the project is to highlight to young people the importance of learning foreign languages and to combat the recent decline in the take up of the subject by many pupils.

University staff will join other members of the consortium in spreading the message that languages skills greatly improve career prospects both here and abroad and can enhance quality of life. The target group is pupils in Years 9 and 11 – the key transition points in their education where they make their study choices for GCSEs and AS levels.

Running until August 2010, the project offers a wide range of activities, including language taster days, intensive courses and master classes in various languages. Project staff will also tap into the latest technology, using blogs, podcasts and video diaries to deliver activities.

Marie-Marthe Gervais-le-Garff, Head of Languages in the Plymouth Business School, is playing a leading role in the initiative. “Since schools were allowed to make the study of foreign languages an option beyond Key Stage 3, fewer and fewer pupils have been choosing to study them, which obviously has a knock on effect on numbers of language students entering higher education,” she said.

“Foreign language skills offer a wealth of opportunities, particularly in terms of career options, and we are determined that the university will play its part in showing more and more students that the route into languages is a very rewarding one.”

highlight the importance of learning foreign languages

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“Foreign language skills offer a wealth of opportunities, particularly in terms of career options, and we are determined that the university will play its part in showing more and more students that the route into languages is a very rewarding one.”

At a conference on 25 April (9am - 3.30pm in the Tamar Committee Room, Babbage Building) you can hear from national experts about recent developments in the employability field and share ideas with colleagues.

The VC, Professor Wendy Purcell, will be giving the opening address at this key event, which aims to:

• raise awareness of new elements in the Skills Plus policy, which include equality and sustainability, and consider how they can contribute to the student experience
• explore the revised policy in the context of employer engagement and the Leitch agenda, and
• highlight and share new initiatives and developments in personal and professional development.

Complementing this event is the university’s fifth placement and work-based learning conference, Profiting from Placement & Work-Based Learning: Realising the Potential, on 8 May. This will look at how to get the most out of placement and work-based learning for the student, the employer and the university. Aimed at all involved in managing and delivering such opportunities, the event will include speakers from industry and enable delegates to share information, experience and good practice.

Information on both conferences is available on the Skills Plus staffnet community.
Big savings on childcare

Childcare vouchers are an easy way for staff to pay for childcare and save money.

That’s because you can choose to take part of your salary (up to £55 per week) in childcare vouchers tax and National Insurance free. The amount you can save depends on what you earn and how much NI you currently pay – however, it may be possible for you to save up to £916 per year (basic rate taxpayer) and up to £1,195 per year (higher rate taxpayer).

The savings you can make are per person – so if your wife, husband or partner also works for the university or another employer who operates the scheme, you could double your savings. And it’s totally up to you how you spend them - whether it’s on your childcare costs, a family holiday or treating the kids, the choice is yours!

Childcare vouchers are not just for babies - they can also be used to pay for the care of children up to the age of 15, including out of school clubs (breakfast clubs, afterschool clubs, boarding) and holiday clubs not just at Freshlings.

If you are currently receiving tax credits, choosing childcare vouchers could affect these. You can use the tax credit estimator to see for yourself whether childcare vouchers are right for you.

Visit www.childcarevouchers.co.uk and click on ‘tax credit estimator’ under ‘tools for parents’, entering scheme ID UNIV6202.

The vouchers are provided electronically and work just like online or telephone banking. They are paid into your personalised childcare vouchers account each month that you can access either via the internet or telephone.

The scheme gives you the flexibility to create standing orders to one or more childcare providers as required, and following your payment request they will receive payment by BACS transfer or cheque depending on their preference.

To join the scheme, visit www.childcarevouchers.co.uk and click on ‘join the scheme’ under ‘tools for parents’, entering scheme ID UNIV6202. If you do not have internet access, telephone the Enrolment Helpline on 0845 365 1258, quoting the scheme ID above.

Writing matters

Plymouth is one of the universities privileged to have a Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow* on its staff.

November 2007

A
uthor Babs Horton joined the university last September thanks to the efforts of staff John Hilsdon and Professor Tony Lopez. She is working alongside the Learning Development Service, which provides support for staff and students in building effective practices and skills for learning and studying. Much of her work is on a one-to-one basis with students, helping them to gain confidence in their writing skills.

A former teacher whose career includes a ten-year period teaching English at a unit for young people with mental health problems, Babs is the author of several highly successful novels. Her first, A Jarful of Angels, won the Pendleton May Prize and was short-listed for the Authors’ Club First Novel Award, while her fourth – Recipes for Cherubs – will be on sale in May.

“Essay writing can be daunting for some students and it’s easy for them to become frustrated,” said Babs. “I hope I can make a difference by spending time with them analysing the essay questions, building an argument, working on structure and fluency. “As a writer I have learned many essential skills and it’s great to come out of isolation and share those skills with others. This is a two-way process because I am learning so much from the students who come to me from the different faculties. I am delighted to be working here at the university because it’s such a vibrant and inspirational place to be.”

*Established in 1999, the Royal Literary Fund’s fellowship scheme is based mainly in UK universities and higher education colleges. RLF fellows are professional writers of literary merit, representing a wide variety of genres.
It was smiles all round when the Student Union’s Volunteering in Plymouth (ViP) team heard the news that their Born to be Wild project had scooped first prize in the national Higher Education Volunteering Awards Outstanding Project category.

From tea dances to befriending projects, Born to be Wild - which triumphed over 39 other entries - incorporates all the activities student volunteers undertake with older members of the community.

“The work of student volunteers is greatly valued by the community,” said UPSU Volunteer Co-ordinator Claire Massey. “It’s also great fun and bring students into contact with people they would normally not associate with their university experience. What’s more, the work of our volunteers helps break down the negative image that students sometimes have within the community. One lady even told the project leader, Omar Siddiqui, that students are ‘strictly amateur’ when it comes to bad behaviour – she maintains that she and her friends were much better at it in their day!”

Staff and students can all benefit from the electronic library launched by Information & Learning Services.

The new facility, Metalib, enables the Library to bring together all online resources in one place and acts as a ‘gateway’ to a wide range of different services - anything from subscribed specialist subject databases and electronic journal collections to e-books, images, maps and popular websites. It offers the flexibility to search individual resources by subject or title and to also cross-search, or ‘metasearch’, several resources at the same time.

The project team, led by Fiona Greig, E-Resource Development Manager, and including Library and IT staff, spent a year implementing the new system with the aim of providing a service able to cater for the information and research needs of both staff and students.

“All Library and IT staff have played a crucial role in answering frontline queries and concerns about this new resource,” said Fiona. “Metalib isn’t entirely intuitive – some basic training helps enormously in understanding the functionality and flexibility that such an electronic library offers.”

According to the team, if students can be encouraged to use this service instead of relying entirely on Google or Wikipedia, it must be a step in the right direction. And Metalib offers huge potential to academic staff and researchers who wish to search and save their ‘favourites’ or search in a more sophisticated way. Ultimately, it can be tailored to suit their individual research requirements.

If you have any queries about Metalib or would like to arrange a training session for yourself, colleagues or students, contact the Subject Librarians team at subjectlibrarians@plymouth.ac.uk.
Media arts firm Motion Plymouth and graphic design company The Darc Group are using the pre-incubation units that form part of this pioneering support service based at the Roland Levinsky Building (RLB).

Managed by the university’s Research & Innovation division, the Formation Zone provides wide-ranging business advice to fledgling companies with an artistic or creative flavour and is open to potential businesses within the university and in the external creative sector. Among its features are hot desks (rentable on a flexible basis), access to Faculty of Arts and wider university resources, a professional meeting environment and mentoring from experts.

Motion Plymouth, the company behind the moving image light festival of the same name in the city, was established in 2006 by Katie Thompson and Dawn Melville, who graduated from the university in 1997.

“We have had more help in these first few weeks than has ever been offered to us before. It has made a real difference,” said Katie.

The Darc Group is run by graphic design duo Robin Holland and David Tetley and has been building a portfolio of clients, including the surf brand Rusty, over the past nine months.

The South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWERDA) helped fund the RLB and the Formation Zone. Ian Thompson, Area Director for Devon, Somerset, Plymouth and Torbay, said: “It will help entrepreneurs in the city and in turn contribute towards economic growth.”

The Formation Zone is sponsoring the Most Innovative Newcomer category at this year’s Media Innovation Awards on 14 March.

For more information, email formationzone@plymouth.ac.uk or call 01752 588954.

This year marks the sixth annual VC’s Teaching & Learning Conference. The event - on 4 July in the Roland Levinsky Building (RLB) - aims to encourage research and innovation in teaching and learning, and enhance practice in all areas of the curriculum. It will include the presentation of the university’s Teaching Fellowship Awards by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wendy Purcell.

The day will feature a keynote presentation and various parallel workshops led by university staff and focused around the theme of ‘Making Connections’. Lunch will provide and there will be an opportunity to view the poster displays, including contributions from previous award holders.

The deadline for workshop proposals is 7 April 2008. Collaborative proposals are particularly welcome, especially those involving support staff and external partners. Further information about proposals and information about previous conferences can be obtained via http://intranet.plymouth.ac.uk/edalt/intranet.htm or by contacting Debby Cotton at dcotton@plymouth.ac.uk / Liz Garland at egarland@plymouth.ac.uk. Further details will be circulated nearer the time.

The afternoon before the conference, staff will have the opportunity to drop into the RLB to find out all about the university’s Centres for Excellence in Teaching & Learning (CETLs) at a special event. In addition, the new Immersive Vision Theatre and LabPlus facilities will be open to visiting staff – for details, look out for an announcement on the staff portal nearer the time.
Super visit

Pendennis is one of the few yards in the world capable of both building and refitting superyachts. As these vessels get bigger and bigger, the career possibilities for Plymouth students multiply due to the worldwide shortage of crew for both commercial cargo ships as well as superyachts. (Last year a brand new graduate, with professional Merchant Navy qualifications gained as part of his course, went straight into a Navigating Officer’s job on an 88m superyacht).

A highlight of the students’ tour was the new state-of-the-art travelling crane that lifts huge yachts straight out of the water and into the various working areas. The vessel students saw in the slings belongs to one of the UK’s most famous rock stars – but such is the veil of privacy the yard must provide for its high-profile clients, we can’t print their name!

“We’re extremely pleased to support this course,” said Toby Allies, Head of Sales & Marketing at Pendennis. “With 4,000 yachts in the global superyacht fleet, there are many opportunities to develop a career in this exciting industry and we recognise that some of the individuals on this course are likely to be our clients of the future – in their roles as captains and project managers.”
The pilot aims to meet the demands of employers by providing them with higher level skills training to help improve business performance. Research & Innovation (R&I) hosts three intermediaries across the region with the remit of business improvement and engineering. The intermediaries work directly with employers to develop demand-led, accredited university-level training which includes the opportunity of applying for development funds to enable specific innovative projects to be undertaken. Working as part of the R&I Knowledge Transfer team, the intermediaries have had much success working with companies ranging from sole traders to multi-nationals and the public sector. Examples include:

- Plymouth Business School and University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) working with Flybe to create a foundation degree in airside operations, encompassing their existing in-house provision. This will be delivered in conjunction with the planned Flybe Training Academy at Exeter Airport
- UPC via Duchy College responding to the technical management needs of several food and drink manufacturers with a 60-credit ‘mini award’ comprising three bite-sized blended learning modules capable of company-specific flexible delivery, and
- the Centre of Leadership & Organisational Excellence (CLOE) providing Algram Group Ltd with a bespoke in-house leadership development programme.

Intermediaries are constantly engaged with local and regional businesses and are well placed to link with other business-facing activities that faculties are engaged with. If you would like to become involved with this innovative approach to collaborative working, contact the Business Enquiry Service on 0800 052 5600 or email businessservices@plymouth.ac.uk

To enhance the contribution of HE to the skills agenda, the Higher Education Funding Council chose the South West as one of the three regions to develop Higher Level Skills Pathfinder projects.

Female first

Clare Simpson recently became the first person to complete an Advanced Apprenticeship in the Faculty of Technology and has joined the multi-skilled team of technicians in the School of Computing, Communications and Electronics.

Clare, 21, received her award from the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Wendy Purcell, and is now set to take the next step in her career by studying for a foundation degree before embarking on the BEng degree in electronic engineering. “We are delighted with Clare’s achievement,” said Professor Neil James, Dean of the Faculty of Technology. “We are committed to attracting more female staff and students to the faculty and are working very hard to achieve our gender equality goals. Clare is a positive role model for other young women and has helped to promote our disciplines to schoolgirls during Girls into Technology visits and course preview days.”

Higher level skills for business

To enhance the contribution of HE to the skills agenda, the Higher Education Funding Council chose the South West as one of the three regions to develop Higher Level Skills Pathfinder projects.
Well, doesn’t time fly when you’re having fun defending, promoting and extending the rights of the 30,000 students at the university! Although it seems like just a couple of months ago that I was voted in, in reality it’s just over a year and we have recently announced the names of the elected officers for next year. The new President will be Darren Jones, whose Deputy will be Aleisha Sampson. The three Vice Presidents will be Chris Rees (Sports), James Redfearn (Activities & Communications) and Alison Smith (Education & Welfare).

But why are the elections so important? For every single vote cast, every virtual ballot filled in, the votes were not just votes for better sports facilities, say, but for Chris to fight for better sports facilities; nobody voted for better representation at academic boards, but for Alison to give better representation.

That’s why the elections are crucial for the SU and so important for our students. It is the time when they express not just what they want, but who they want to do it - someone approachable who they feel can relate to them and the issues that matter to them.

In my opinion the very act of voting itself is a powerful gesture – it is one that says, “I care about my union and my fellow students; it is my right as a member to have a say over its direction.”

I believe that the elections process is one key way to tackle the supposed student apathy which is the talk of so many student unions around the country as it provides a platform to tell them why they should be interested in the issues that affect them.

Only through these large, public platforms of union promotion, and the continual push to further inform our members of union democratic procedures and services, can we ever seek to truly engage our students and inspire a sense of ownership among them.

A GIANT FISH trained to be fed on hearing a certain sound captured the attention of the national media, including The Times and the Daily Mail. Working with the National Marine Aquarium, Plymouth scientist Dr Phil Gee has trained Bentley, a three-foot long wrasse, to respond to the sound, made by banging on the gate of a small enclosure just off his main swimming tank. “Bentley has learned and remembers that he will be rewarded with food when he swims into the holding pool,” said Dr Gee. “We’re learning more about fish every day and they are not the cold, slimy, brainless creatures many people still believe them to be. One of the most common misconceptions is that fish have very short memories,” he added.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES are at the core of what health professionals do, according to Nursing Lecturer Benny Goodman, writing for Nursing Standard. Benny says sustainability should not be a bolt-on for the curriculum. “Maybe we tutors should be developing curricula that use it as a thread running throughout,” he said. “Nursing is not just about healthy individuals; it ought to be about healthy environments too.”

PARKING CHARGES on campus were the subject of a recent Times Higher article which quoted Plymouth’s Assistant Director of Learning Facilities, Wini Coles. Outside London, Plymouth’s campus parking fees are higher than at any other university.”In about 2004 we put together a green travel plan,” said Wini, who cycles to and from work. “One of the strategic objectives was to reduce car dependence and usage. It was part of our green objectives.”

A REFORMED TROUBLEMAKER who became the first person in the UK to have an ASBO lifted for good behaviour, was the focus of an article in The Sun. Charlie Taylor mended his ways and, to help himself and others like him, set up a youth project in the very recreation ground he was banned from. Now studying at Plymouth for a degree in criminology, Charlie said, “My ASBO wasn’t a badge of honour – it was a social death warrant.”

Students’ Union Activities & Communications Officer Aaron ‘Face’ Taylor (left) brings us the latest news from the SU.
Jeremy Strong (above), author behind the hilarious tales of Streaker, the Hundred-Mile-An-Hour-Dog, kicks off the exciting programme with a talk in Theatre 1 at the Roland Levinsky Building (RLB) – and the star of the book herself will be in tow!

Jeremy is in Plymouth with his Hundred-Mile-An-Hour-Dog roadshow to mark the National Year of Reading 2008. The audience can expect some real laughs as Streaker takes to the stage to tell her adventures in her own words.

Austrian Masters is the title of a Ten Tors Orchestra Concert (Saturday 5 April, 7.30pm) at St Andrew’s Church, Plymouth, conducted by Simon Ible and featuring trumpet soloist Alison Balsom. Alison will be performing Haydn’s Trumpet Concerto in E flat major and the evening’s programme also features Beethoven’s Coriolan Overture, the Don Giovanni Overture by Mozart and Schubert’s Symphony No 3 in D major.

Other highlights include a major exhibition by artspaces.co.uk in the Gallery at the RLB (10 April – 26 May). Now in its fifth year, artsspaces is a young South West based company with 70 artists on its books and offers a wide ranging service including corporate art for hire, a free loan service and corporate and private commissions.

Moving the Sun and Traffic - to be held in the Jill Craigie Cinema in the RLB (Wednesday 30 April, 8pm) - is a unique audio-visual experience performed by Mike McInery and Tim Sayer.

The piece combines traditional Japanese performance with live generated abstract images on screen and is inspired by an account of a brain-damaged patient whose sense of free will was so distorted he believed he was actively setting the sun and moving cars along the street.

For more details of Peninsula Arts events or to order tickets for the above, contact the box office on 01752 585050 or visit www.peninsula-arts.co.uk

Bistro One, situated in Ebrington Street just minutes from the university, is at the heart of the new food revolution in Plymouth, offering original and affordable dishes featuring produce sourced from the Westcountry.

Chef and proprietor Stephen Barrett prides himself on his trading links suppliers – knowing them personally gives the edge when sourcing the best of local foods. As an ‘spring special’, he is offering a Bistro Meze for Two, which includes a bottle of Domaine Grauzan Sauvignon Blanc and is worth £45, as a competition prize. What does the word bistro(t) mean? Send your answer by 13 April to scb@stephenbarrett.com – the winner will be the first correct answer drawn from the hat.

For more information about Bistro One, visit the website at www.bistro-one.co.uk

This edition, the last word goes to Susie Byrne (right), Registry Administrator.

The last...

Place I went on holiday
Gwithian in Cornwall. Dinner every night with the best view in the world - from our campervan.

Film that had me riveted
Pan’s Labyrinth - dark and disturbing but at the same time beautiful.

Time I really laughed
At work - we work hard in Exams & Awards but we also have a good laugh. There have been some belters!

Person I hugged
Nick, my husband.

Thing that bugged me
People who don’t clear up after their four-legged friends.

CD I bought
Tinariwen - Aman Iman: Water is Life

Item I put on my credit card
A print of bluebells in beech woods for a friend’s 40th birthday.

Time I celebrated
The last big one was my sister’s wedding last year.

If you’d like to feature in this regular column, email Paola Simoneschi at paola.simoneschi@plymouth.ac.uk
Second-year students from the university’s 3D design degree recently exhibited their work in the state-of-the-art Roland Levinsky Building. Shown here are students Kate Sibley and Sean Moffat.