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Left: The University’s new £130m building, Portland Square.
Right: An interior shot showing part of the state-of-the-art building.

Portland Square opens
Landmark building for Plymouth

Navy partnership
Helping cadet officers

Big boost for EarlyBird
Grant helps diabetes research

Restoring the rainforest
The plight of the Chocó
The University’s new £30-million Portland Square building had its official opening in the summer, when former Plymouth MP the Rt Hon Lord David Owen, patron of the Peninsula Medical School Foundation, visited the state-of-the-art building on the campus at North Hill.

Speaking about the building, which is part of the new urban vision for the city of Plymouth, Professor Roland Levinsky, Vice-Chancellor of the University, said: “Portland Square is a bold statement about the University’s continued growth and its investment in the city and the region. It represents our commitment to the South West’s healthcare and economic development.

“The project team has done an excellent job in producing a landmark building for the city of Plymouth and our students and staff will benefit from superb facilities in a highly attractive, sensitively designed environment.”

The 12,500 square metre building provides first-class facilities for the Plymouth-based students of the Peninsula Medical School*, as well as accommodation for the training of nurses and other healthcare professionals. It also houses departments that contribute to medical and healthcare teaching and research, namely computing, psychology, electronic engineering, neuroscience, biology and environmental science. It is intended that bringing together students and staff from these disciplines will harness academic synergies for future innovation in teaching and research.

The building sets new architectural standards for the University and is environmentally sophisticated. Through a combination of high-performance glazing and a natural flow of air (the three inter-connected atria act as chimneys to suck air through the building) natural ventilation and cooling have minimised the building’s energy requirements.

The opening ceremony was attended by city dignitaries including the Lord Mayor, Councillor David Stark, a former governor of the University. Guests viewed displays illustrating the work of the academic departments housed at Portland Square and witnessed the cutting-edge Cybrid project, which gathers basic electronic signals from the management systems of a building, passes them through a computer and generates musical sounds and visual patterns that reflect the mood of the building.

See back cover for more Portland Square photographs.

* The Peninsula Medical School was formed through a unique partnership between the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter and the NHS in Devon and Cornwall.
Over 6,000 students hoping to find a University place through the Clearing system called the University’s Actionline team following the publication of the A level results – a 2.6% increase on last year. Electronic enquiries (emails and online enquiry forms) also increased since last year – by a massive 44%.

The specially trained team of current students took the calls and – by the end of August – 250 people had been offered, and had accepted, a place on a degree course at the University. At the time of the Clearing going to print, a further 844 places (including applications received via the Nursing & Midwifery Admissions Service) were awaiting confirmation.

The Clearing Open Days were well attended by prospective students keen to get a taste of student life.

Professor Les Ebdon, said: “We had more telephone lines than ever as we expected a rush of enquiries once the A level results were announced. We were pleased to be able to help so many students on what can be a very stressful day.

“The A level grades achieved by students coming to the University of Plymouth were substantially up, reflecting our growing reputation as a leading modern University.”

Royal Navy cadet officers now have the opportunity to gain a highly sought-after educational award at the same time as qualifying as naval officers, thanks to a new in-service degree course validated by the University and offered at Britannia Royal Naval College (BRNC) in Dartmouth.

The new in-service degree, which was officially launched on 31 July at BRNC, is available at no extra cost to the cadet officers and, upon successful completion of this foundation, they can progress to a full honours degree.

“We have worked with Britannia Royal Naval College for ten years, providing University accreditation for officer training,” said Dr Ian Tunbridge, the University’s Director of Academic Partnerships.

“The development of the Navy’s own foundation degree in partnership with us has been a logical development, recognising the academic and vocational excellence of Royal Navy training and the University’s national profile in partnerships and degree development work, as well as our international reputation in marine-related degree and research activity.

“This gives the Royal Navy vocationally relevant University support and progression routes to subjects such as navigation, logistics and other marine topics.”

The University’s position as a world-leading provider of education in marine science has been formally recognised by an international professional membership body and learned society for marine professionals.

Two of the University’s postgraduate courses – MSc Hydrography and MRes Geomatics – are the first marine science courses to be accredited by the Institute of Marine Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST).

Professor Roddy Williamson, Dean of the Faculty of Science at the University, said: “It is an honour to receive this prestigious accreditation from IMarEST in recognition of the quality and professional value of our training and postgraduate programmes.

“Plymouth has an international reputation for teaching and research in marine science and technology and we are pleased to work closely with professional bodies and learned societies to enhance our courses and provide our graduates with the most up-to-date skills and knowledge for their chosen careers.”

For further information about the University’s postgraduate courses in marine science, contact 01752 232840, or visit the website at www.plymouth.ac.uk.

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The University has launched an innovative new undergraduate degree course incorporating elements of the Eden Project’s ethos. The hugely successful Eden Project explores the wonders of plants and their interaction with people – as Eden’s Chief Executive, Tim Smit, says: ‘merging arts with science and technology to get the message across in the friendliest possible way’.

The three-year BSc (Hons) Plant Discovery and Exploitation course combines a strong applied plant science core (including field biology, biochemistry, physiology and pathology) with an optional ‘arts’ strand, offering a more diverse perspective than traditional plant science degrees. The new degree has evolved from an existing course, BSc (Hons) Plant Sciences, which has received consistently positive feedback from students and external agencies.

Dr Stuart Lane, Principal Lecturer in Plant Sciences, said: ‘Along with the University’s MScs in Botanical Conservation and the recently validated Horticulture foundation degrees at several of our partner colleges, the Plant Discovery and Exploitation degree draws on the Eden Project’s spirit’ and facilities there. Initial feedback from potential employers suggests that the balance of traditional science, arts and graduate skills in the new degree means there will be plenty of attractive career opportunities open to graduates.”

For further information, contact 01752 233093/email: senciens@plymouth.ac.uk.

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The start of the new school year prompts many parents to shop for shoes for their children but, says a foot expert from the University, they need to make sure they fit properly.

According to Tony Achilles, Senior Lecturer in Podiatry at the University of Plymouth, the key to good foot health is a properly fitted shoe. It is much more important than the price tag or brand name.

Tony explained: “At birth, the foot contains 22 bones, increasing to 45 at school age. These continue to fuse together to form the 26 bones present in adulthood.

“The foot continues to grow and change throughout childhood and, although most parents recognise the need for well-fitting footwear in early childhood, many do not realise that throughout the teenage years the foot is still vulnerable to ill-fitting shoes.

“There is concern among parents as to where they should buy their children’s shoes, particularly as many now cost around £30 or £40 a pair but a properly fitted shoe is by far the most important factor – the brand name should be the least significant.”

Tony Achilles has worked as a podiatrist for ten years. He teaches on the University’s BSc (Hons) Podiatry degree course and runs podiatry clinics from the North Road West surgery in Plymouth as part of the students’ clinical experience. Tony treats patients from all walks of life, giving comfort and relief to those with lower-limb disorders and providing professional advice on foot care and the prevention of foot problems in children.

Anyone with concerns about their child’s feet or associated walking problems should contact a state-registered podiatrist who specialises in the area of podo-paediatrics (children’s foot problems).

Further information about BSc (Hons) Podiatry is available by telephoning 01752 233842 or sending an email to: healtheducation@plymouth.ac.uk.
Businesses in the South West can now benefit from a new government-supported initiative that helps find expert solutions for real business problems.

The region’s universities and further education colleges are working together to promote the new Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP) scheme that will give regional and national businesses access to the knowledge and expertise to drive their businesses forward.

Universities in the South West, including the University of Plymouth, were active participants in the programme’s predecessor, the Teaching Company Scheme (TCS), which had a 28-year record in helping companies take advantage of university expertise.

During that time, academic staff aided over 400 companies in achieving significant business benefits — for example, the environmental management programme with Lloyd Maunder, supplier of poultry, red meat and meat products to the retail sector, saved the company a staggering £2 million.

Dr Barry Twite, South West Regional Consultant for KTP, said: “These new partnerships will offer companies the chance to work closely with a team of academic experts, while supporting a high-calibre graduate who has the potential to develop into an influential business leader. In addition, the government will subsidise up to 60% of the project costs.”

Emma Hewitt and Shelie Goodwillie, who manage KTP offices at the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter respectively, said: “Having this opportunity to build on the outstanding success of TCS and develop even more long-term partnerships with our local businesses is very exciting. We want to encourage more companies to talk to us about the challenges their businesses are facing so that we can put them in touch with academics whose leading-edge research can really make a difference.”

Anyone interested in seeing how TCS programmes have provided significant benefits for businesses, graduates and universities alike, can register for a place at the Regional Seminar on 22 October at St Mellion Golf & Country Club near Callington.

For further information about this event or KTP, contact Emma Hewitt on 01752 233504 (email: emma.hewitt@plymouth.ac.uk) or Shelley Goodwillie on 01392 262397 (email: S.A.Goodwillie@ex.ac.uk).

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**Diabetes UK**, a leading charity for people with diabetes, has awarded a prestigious grant to the EarlyBird Diabetes Study, which is based at the Peninsula Medical School’s Plymouth site.

The grant, worth £139,000, will allow the EarlyBird study to continue its research into the childhood factors that lead to the development of diabetes in later life and its work into the early prevention of diabetes in children. One in 20 adults already has diabetes; but if the present trend continues, it is believed that one in ten of our children will get it in their lifetime.

The EarlyBird study is concerned with the fact that type 2, or so-called ‘adult-onset’, diabetes is beginning to appear in children. It is the commonest cause of blindness, kidney failure and amputation in the UK. Heart attacks and strokes are three times more likely in adults with type 2 diabetes.

Dr Linda Voss, Senior Research Fellow and Co-ordinator of the EarlyBird study, said: “This is the first time in history where a significant number of parents will outlive their children. It is important that EarlyBird has achieved national recognition on this scale because South West researchers are playing a vital role in challenging diabetes. Much has been learnt in recent years and EarlyBird is an important study for children and in working toward stopping this potential epidemic.”

Subject to funding, the EarlyBird study will run until the current group finishes school. The 12-year project’s early results are concerning, as findings show that one in four children are overweight by the time they start school. A number of studies carried out at the Peninsula Medical School have shown a clear relationship between diet, lifestyle and diabetes.

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Funding is critical to the continuation of this research so I am delighted EarlyBird has received this award. In addition, many local people and companies have supported us after a fundraising initiative last year and some sizeable donations were received from national organisations, including Unilever. I hope people continue to support us.”

For further details of the EarlyBird Diabetes Trust or to make a donation visit the website at www.earlybirddiabetestrust.org or contact Dr Linda Voss on 01752 792552.
Following a successful three-year programme, the Student Progression & Transfer (SPAT) project – funded by £250,000 from the Higher Education Funding Council for England – has been granted £25,000 of additional funding to extend its work.

SPAT addresses the collaborative provision of higher education (HE) by universities and their partner further education (FE) colleges, looking at both strategic and operational issues with a particular focus on the experience of students progressing through FE and transferring to HE.

The specific target group is students progressing from foundation degrees or HNDs to the second or third year of an honours degree (although the material developed as part of the project has wider applicability). As the number of foundation degrees increases, there is likely to be more students progressing to ‘top-up’ degrees in the future.

Dr Paul Ramsay, from the School of Biological Sciences, is Chief Ecological Advisor for a project that aims to restore a little-known forest in South America. Having recently returned from Ecuador, where he was working with local communities and organisations such as Rainforest Concern, he explains more about the project...

“Everyone knows about the plight of the Amazon rainforest, but how many have heard of the Choco? The forest there – on the western slopes of the Andes in Colombia and Ecuador – contains more species than the Amazon rainforest, many of which aren’t found anywhere else. Safeguarding the forests in the Choco is one of the highest priorities for organisations concerned with conservation.

“While the Colombian Choco is currently a stronghold of guerrilla activity, the Ecuadorian part is relatively peaceable. In the last 50 years, landless families from elsewhere in Ecuador have settled the steep slopes and cleared the forest to grow crops such as coffee.

“Unfortunately, this kind of activity is not sustainable. Without forest, the fields quickly lose their soil, crops fail and livestock grazing is the only option. Often, the original colonists cannot survive on the small revenue that this provides and they sell the damaged land to wealthy, city-dwelling landowners.

“When it rains, the water runs straight off the fields into the rivers. At other times, the same rivers dry up. Many local communities now survive most of the year with just a trickle of contaminated water. They know replanting the forest is the solution, but in many cases the land now belongs to distant landowners with little interest in the well-being of local people.

But there is a tremendous urgency amongst community leaders to tackle the problem.

This knowledge of the sector’s needs helped to make your materials so useable and adaptable.

“This is very much a low-tech project. Local people visit small pockets of remaining forest to collect seeds. Then they tend the seedlings in makeshift nurseries and plant the saplings in the fields. There’s no need for specialist equipment. It’s just farmers growing plants it’s something they feel confident about. In about five years, perhaps less, the trees will have grown enough to improve the water supplies to local villages. In the longer term, these trees will help to join up remnants of the original forest, providing habitat for a wide range of animals and plants.”

Dr Ramsay will visit the watersheds annually to monitor progress and advise on ways to encourage native biodiversity into the new forests. “Not all species will be able to colonise at the start,” he explained. “Some need the special conditions you get only once the forest has developed. We’ll have to wait before introducing these. We also need to look at the original forest to know what we are aiming for. The diversity of plants and animals is extremely high, and all we can do is provide an appropriate environment for them to colonise naturally. But we can assist this process by using what fragments still remain to ‘inoculate’ the new forest with the species they contain.”

Dr Ramsay will visit the watersheds again next year. In the meantime, local villagers will be carrying thousands of young trees into the fields. Their future depends on it.
Two-hundred-and-seventy children from Hyde Park Infants’ School in Plymouth recently helped solve a baffling mystery at an ‘investigative science day’, encouraged by staff from the Faculty of Science who organised the event, and a Plymouth Scene of Crimes Officer.

The day started with the discovery that the favourite teacup of one of the teaching assistants had mysteriously gone missing. During assembly the children helped narrow down the search for the culprit to four suspects on the school staff. When no confession was forthcoming, they used a series of forensic scientific analyses to find the guilty party and help solve the crime. Lecturing and research staff from the Faculty of Science were on hand to assist the children in their enquiries.

Seven-year-old Katie Pearson of Sycamore Class explained: “Year 2 solved the problem with chromatography and fingerprints and it turned out to be Mrs Hill, our Head Teacher! In her defence she said she it was all a mistake – she had just been just ‘tidying up’. All of agreed that science is great!”

Dr Matthew Watkinson, from Geological Sciences, who devised and organised the day in conjunction with Jackie Warren at Hyde Park School, was assisted by University colleagues Dr Tim O’Hare, Will Diver, Jodie Fisher, Claire Foster and Jenny Ingram. Speaking about the event, he said: “The aim was to generate an exciting day of investigative science activities that would catch the imagination of these children. It’s the first time we have planned such a large event for such young children, and their response and enthusiasm was overwhelming.

“The activities were designed to help the school introduce more investigative science into their curriculum. It is one of a large number of projects initiated by the Faculty of Science and Plymouth to support science education in the region and encourage children’s interest in the subject. Following this success, we’re hoping that other infant schools will run similar days in the future.”

The summer saw graduates of the Faculty of Arts & Education receive their awards in the beautiful setting of Exeter Cathedral. Honorary graduates were Paul Wilson, a musician, teacher and composer whose life and work has been dedicated to making music accessible to everyone, and Professor Harold Silver, one of the finest scholars of the history of education, who has been Visiting Professor of Education at the University since 1992.

The University’s international graduates were joined by family and friends from across the world when they attended their award ceremony at Plymouth’s Guildhall.

The University’s new postgraduate prospectus (2004/5) has recently been published – in print and on the website at www.plymouth.ac.uk. It includes details of all current postgraduate programmes as well as information on University services and facilities.

Copies of the prospectus are available from the Department of Marketing & Public Relations on ext 2232.

Apologies to the Media Arts and Visual Arts graduands who were overlooked in the article on page 13 of the July/August edition of Ufront, which reported that the annual degree show ‘showcased the work of students graduating from the School of Art & Design’. This should have read ‘…the work of Media Arts and Visual Arts graduands from the School of Arts & Humanities and graduands from the School of Art & Design’.
**conferences**

21 October

- On-line Assessment and Feedback
  Venue: Robbins Conference Centre, Plymouth campus
  The use of on-line assessment, linked to effective immediate feedback, offers the prospect of more efficient and effective use of staff time and improved feedback to students on how to improve future learning. This meeting will examine general issues of on-line assessment and feedback and look in more depth at experiences of using two authorware systems – QM Perception and TRIADS. Opportunities will be available for delegates to present posters on their own work and try out examples of both authorware systems.

Register at www.bio.ltsn.ac.uk/events/registration/olaaf.htm

22 October

- Promoting Successful Learning & Teaching at Plymouth
  Venue: Robbins Conference Centre, Plymouth campus
  Come and share in the many exciting Learning and Teaching initiatives taking place across the University. This half-day conference aims to raise staff awareness and provide an opportunity for dissemination and networking across a broad range of topics and key issues currently challenging all HE providers. The conference is a celebration of the many successful projects currently in progress and will culminate in the presentation of the Teaching Fellowship Awards by the Vice-Chancellor.

Register at www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/ed

**careersfairs**

- Careers and Postgraduate Study Fair (Main Hall and Sherwell Centre)
- Maritime Careers Fair (Sherwell Centre)
- Civil Engineering and Environmental Building Fair (Sherwell Centre)

For further details, contact Jackie Taylor on 01752 232274 or Becky Morris on 01752 232271.

**concerts**

- Skampa String Quartet – Mozart: Adagio and Fugue in C minor; Smetana: Quartet No1 in E minor ‘From my Life’. Tickets £10 (£5 concessions).

Concerts will be held in the Upper Lecture Theatre of the Sherwell Centre at 7.30 pm. Tickets are available from the University Reception in the Security Lodge, by contacting Alice Li, Department of Marketing & Public Relations, on 01752 233988 or at the door on the night.

**exhibition**

30 September – 31 October

- Graphic designs and digital illustrations by James Crisp (james.crisp@plymouth.ac.uk).
  Venue: Sherwell Centre, Plymouth campus

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