Copy deadline for the next issue is 3 December.
Please send all items to Tammy Baines, Marketing & Public Relations Department, Plymouth campus/email: t1baines@plymouth.ac.uk.

**Concerts**

**24 November**
- 7.30 pm: 16th- and 17th-century church music from the German lands by the early music choir Voces in Buckfast Abbey. Admission is free.

**1 December**
- 7.30 pm: University of Plymouth Choral Society Christmas concert, St Andrew’s Church, Plymouth. The programme will include excerpts from Handel’s Messiah, plus traditional carols for audience participation. Tickets are £6 (concessions £4) from Plymouth Music Shop, on 01752 670403. Contact: Simon Ible on 01566 783310.

**4 December**
- 7.30 pm: University Carol Service at Catherine St Baptist Church, Plymouth. A service of carols and readings to celebrate the season. Contact: Barry Hallett on ext 2261.

**7 December**
- 8 pm: University of Plymouth Orchestra concert – Davy Main Hall, Plymouth campus. Admission is free. Contact: Simon Ible on 01566 783310.

**8 December**

**4 December**
- 7.30 pm: University Carol Service at Catherine St Baptist Church, Plymouth. A service of carols and readings to celebrate the season. Contact: Barry Hallett on ext 2261.

**19 January**
- 7.30 pm: Plymouth Chamber Music concert with David Curry (tenor) with Helen Collyer (piano) – Sherwell Centre. Beethoven: An die fernen Geliebte; Schubert: Songs from Die Schöne Müllerin; Britten, Vaughan Williams, Quiller, Verdi, Bizet, Massenet, Puccini. Tickets: £9 (£5 concessions). Contact: Alice Li on ext 3988.

Tickets for concerts in the Sherwell Centre are available from reception in the Security Lodge, Plymouth campus/Alice Li, Marketing & Public Relations Department, on ext 3988. Alternatively, tickets are available at the door on the night.
Partnership sealed
University signs agreement with Eden

On the beat
Meet the new University police liaison officer

What's your poison?
Arsenic is not all bad!

Software for space
Graduate's role in mission to Mars
Plymouth’s links with the Eden Project were cemented early in November with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between our two organisations. The memorandum recognises the huge potential for collaborative research and educational work in future. See opposite for the full story.

If you’re interested in becoming a ‘newshound’ and helping to identify, research and write about stories like this for future issues of UPfront, why not join our editorial meetings? The dates for your diary are:

Tuesday 4 December 2001
2 pm – 3.30 pm Robbins SR 3

Tuesday 5 February 2002
2 pm – 3.30 pm Babbage Hamoaze

Wednesday 3 April 2002
10.30 am – 12 pm Babbage Hamoaze

Thursday 30 May 2002
2 pm – 3.30 pm Babbage Hamoaze

As UPfront goes to print, the recruitment process for a new Vice-Chancellor to succeed Professor John Bull is well underway. His will be a hard act to follow, and his successor takes on a challenging agenda, as Plymouth pursues its vision of becoming a world-class university.

The tables were turned on Professor Bull earlier this month: instead of his usual role of awarding degrees, he was himself collecting an award. Dartington College of Arts conferred an honorary fellowship on him for his personal contribution to its development as a thriving arts establishment. However, he didn’t manage to step out of role completely, as he also gave the congregation address.

And finally, a seasonal reminder: don’t forget to get your Christmas card orders in as soon as possible (see page 6).

Corinne Farrell
Editor

Cover: Photo by Simon Burt.
(Thanks to Apex Photo Agency.)
The University has formalised its relationship with the Eden Project with the signing of an official agreement.

Prior to giving a public lecture at the University on 9 November, Tim Smit, chief executive of Eden, put his signature to the Memorandum of Understanding, which was signed on behalf of the University by Professor Les Ebdon, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), and Professor Mark Blacksell, dean of the Faculty of Science. The agreement identifies future areas of mutually beneficial co-operation between the two organisations.

Existing collaboration includes staff secondments, student placements and course visits. Shared projects in the future could include the development of new courses and co-operation in research, as well as joint publications and collaboration on seeking joint funding to support teaching and research initiatives.

“Given Tim Smit’s vision of creating Eden as a unique environment for learning and education and the University’s longstanding reputation for excellence in science, the partnership between us is a natural development,” said Professor Ebdon. “We have an excellent relationship with Eden and this agreement opens the way for exciting developments in the future.”

Tim Smit added: “We look forward to exploring the potential of working with excellent universities such as Plymouth to help deliver Eden’s potential as a resource for higher education students and researchers.”
n Academic staff keen to spend time teaching abroad are encouraged to find out more about the Socrates-Erasmus programme, which can provide co-funding for teaching exchanges and other activities. An EU initiative, the programme relies on co-operation between higher education institutions across the EU, Economic Area countries such as Norway and Iceland, and the associated countries of central and eastern Europe. It encourages student and teacher mobility and the further development of a European dimension within the study programmes offered at participating institutions.

“Some staff may be unaware of the personal and professional benefits that the Socrates experience offers,” says Andrew Finch, the University's European officer and Socrates institutional co-ordinator. “Through the programme the International Office can provide co-funding to support teaching exchanges of up to eight weeks' duration. These are an excellent opportunity for continuing professional development and the students benefit from being taught by staff from other parts of Europe.”

Those interested in finding out more should visit the web pages at www.plymouth.ac.uk/secure/intoff/tsmobility.htm. Andrew Finch can be contacted on ext 3341/ email:socrates@plymouth.ac.uk.

Well done to staff from the Finance Department and the Faculty of Human Sciences who slipped into ‘something more comfortable’ to raise money for Genes for Jeans.

On Jeans for Genes Day staff paid £1 to wear jeans to work and raised over £100 for the charity, which helps research genetic disorders in children.

The Review and Approval Office is in for a busy year with new quality assurance procedures being implemented and many foundation degrees being introduced. “Lynn Harvey and Mandy Tapscott’s knowledge and experience have been invaluable and I couldn’t ask for a more dedicated team,” said Rachel, who added that visitors to the office in Hepworth House might like to remember that the team is rather partial to chocolate!

"review and approval office"

"don't use the V word!"
If you see a police officer on campus, there’s probably no cause for alarm - it’s likely to be the University’s new liaison officer, WPC Rachael Carnell (left)!

Having left behind four years of punishing shift work where armed robberies and serious assaults were part of the everyday routine, Rachael has been working as the community officer for Plymouth’s Drake ward for the past 15 months. Although less emergency driven, her present job is no less demanding and just as varied. In addition to her new role with the University she is one of just a few drugs testers within Devon and Cornwall Constabulary and also works as a victim liaison officer. This involves helping victims of sexual assault through the entire investigation process from medical examinations through to court cases.

“There’s no such thing as a typical day for me - my biggest challenge is fitting everything in!” says 28-year-old Rachael, who was born and raised in Plymouth and formerly worked for Customs and Excise. “I’m really excited about my new role working with the University, though. There has been a really positive response to the relationship we’ve been building over the past three years and I’ve been made to feel very welcome. In the first few weeks I’ve had to deal with a couple of problems – thefts in campus buildings and issues relating to parking – but the University is a large and lively community, so that’s only to be expected.

“My primary role is investigating crime and advising people. Although I’m based at Plymouth, I’m here to help staff and students across all campuses with any issues of concern and I hope to become a familiar face. I’ve already worked closely with the Students’ Union and I’ve also advised Pat Blower, the international students’ support officer, on crime prevention information she can offer to overseas students. Operation Columbus is a new initiative designed to help foreign students who may be victims of street robberies.”

Rachael, whose appointment is for a minimum of two years, is confident that not all of her dealings with the University will be problem related. “I’m looking forward to chatting to students at live gigs – and I’ll be eagerly awaiting my invitation to the May Ball!” she says.
**new in brief**

**thank you**

Plymouth-based labourer Dave Morris would like to thank colleagues for all the cards and get well wishes he has received following his recent health problems.

“I have been overwhelmed by the amount of cards I’ve received,” says Dave. “I’m continuing to rest at home and I want to express my gratitude for everyone’s support.”

**swap-shop launch**

The University’s Procurement Unit has developed an exchange-and-mart-style ‘swap-shop’ for staff. The idea is to help ensure the University makes best use of all its resources, by providing a forum for staff to advertise furniture or equipment – either that they need, or that is surplus to their own requirements but could have a second lease of life elsewhere in the University.

The web page is already live – but it will only really work if people make use of it. So before you bin that old filing cabinet, or go out to buy a brand new display system, check out the Procurement Unit’s ‘surplus and wants’ page on the staff section of the University’s website.

[www.plymouth.ac.uk/secure/procurement/surwan.htm](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/secure/procurement/surwan.htm)

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**christmas**

This year’s corporate Christmas cards (right) will be sold in aid of the Cancer Research Campaign, the NSPCC, RNIB, RSPCA, the British Heart Foundation and Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

The full-colour designs are printed on high quality card with a gloss varnish, measuring 170 mm x 170 mm. The wording inside reads ‘season’s greetings from the University of Plymouth’ and includes the University logo in black and a list of campuses. Cards costs £1.00 each (including VAT) and are available by internal order from the Marketing and Public Relations Department. Alternatively, cards can be bought at reception in the Security Lodge on the Plymouth campus.

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**new dean**

Professor Rod Blackshaw is the new dean of the Faculty of Land, Food and Leisure at Seale-Hayne.

An acknowledged expert in the ecology and management of soil-dwelling insects, Professor Blackshaw is already a familiar face at Seale-Hayne, where he was head of the department of agriculture and food studies, with a professorship in agricultural zoology, from 1996. He relinquished this post in July 2001 to take up the role of faculty head of research, prior to his current appointment.

“I am delighted at being appointed to the position of dean,” says Cheshire-bom Professor Blackshaw. “I am confident that the faculty’s high research and consultancy profile and excellent relationships with the commercial sector will continue to ensure that our courses are relevant to the world of work as well as being intellectually stimulating.”
The University is co-ordinating a two-year, £500 million European research project on the use of selenium and arsenic in our diet.

The European Union Research Directorate, which plays a vital role in protecting the health of European citizens while promoting high quality food, has awarded a grant of £350,000 to the project. There are 20 laboratories taking part in Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Hungary, Spain, France and Norwich, but the project is being led by Professor Les Ebdon, Professor of Analytical Chemistry and Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at the University of Plymouth. Dr Les Pitts of the Department of Environmental Sciences will play a key role in co-ordination of this massive project, which will be administered through the University’s enterprise company by Kate Bowling.

The work is timed to co-ordinate with a world-wide study on how men may be protected from prostate cancer through selenium in the diet. Professor Les Ebdon explains: “Selenium is an essential element in the diet at very low levels. At higher levels it can be toxic. Changes in the European diet have led to the reduction of selenium levels in our food. For example, much of the UK’s wheat was imported from the USA until about 20 years ago. Since then we have been using European wheat, which is much lower level in selenium. This reduction in the amount of selenium in our diet may be one cause of the growing incidence of prostate cancer.

“Only certain forms of selenium appear to be good for us. We know little about the forms which help to protect us against cancer. Some scientists believe that if selenium is incorporated into yeast, this converts the selenium into a beneficial chemical form, but until now we have had no agreed way of checking that. Project will use the latest technology, capable of measuring very low levels of a chemical, to standardise how different laboratories measure the amount and forms of selenium in yeast. Our aim is to produce a reference material, which enables laboratories to check the claims and efficacy of products in the growing so-called ‘nutraceutical’ market-place of dietary supplements. Without this reference material there is the possibility of harmful supplements being on the chemists’ shelves as well as beneficial ones. If, as expected, the clinical trials of these supplements show a way to reduce the incidence of prostate cancer, there will be enormous interest.”

The study will also look at arsenic levels in chicken. Researchers in Hungary are feeding chickens on a high-protein diet consisting of fish meal and grain, typical of that used in many high yield farms in Europe. Chickens fed on this diet have elevated arsenic levels - but it is thought that this arsenic is present in a completely safe organic form. Scientific researchers working in the 20 laboratories across Europe will measure the level and forms of arsenic present in these chickens. This will then provide a common standard for food safety checks. Similar work will be undertaken for rice, fish and soil.

Professor Ebdon comments, “The work on the different forms of arsenic and assuring the safety of food to the public, arises from work we completed a few years ago in our laboratories. Communities which eat large amounts of fish take in relatively large amounts of arsenic, but show no ill-effects and certainly no effects of arsenic poisoning. Clearly there is a chemical form of arsenic in fish which is harmless, and we were able to show that this is a chemical form called arsphenobetaine, which is stable in cooking and digestion. As a fish-eater myself I was very relieved we were able to confirm this! In recent years fish meal has been added to the diet of many animals but especially chickens. We need to be able to monitor that it is present only in harmless forms.”
n Christmas can be lonely without family and friends around but this is the reality for some international students. Not all of them are able to return home during the holiday period, but you could help to make it a more cheerful time for them!

If you have room to spare and you’re interested in other cultures, why not give some thought to inviting an overseas student to spend Christmas with you? National organisation Host UK is looking for volunteers willing to open up their homes for a three-day period over Christmas*. This gesture can make a real difference to international students and their impressions of Britain while hosts get to learn about other countries from the comfort of their own homes.

For further information, telephone 020 7254 3039 or visit the website at www.hostuk.org.

*Host UK also seeks volunteer hosts for other times of year.

Professor Les Ebdon, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), has been appointed to the Royal Society of Chemistry’s new Strategy and Resources Board. Professor Ebdon is one of the first two independent members to be appointed. The Board will advise the Council on strategy and oversee the management of the RSC’s resources.

As well promoting awareness of equal opportunities (EO) issues within the University, the EO Department is a source of information and support to staff and students conducting research into equal opportunities. They can be contacted on ext 3978 or via email at: eodevelopment@plymouth.ac.uk.

The team would like to thank everyone who sent in nominations for the education category of the Plymouth Women of Achievement Awards. Details of the nominees will appear in the next edition of UPfront.

Our centre is one of just 24 national subject-focused centres, collectively known as the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), the main aim of which is to promote and disseminate good practice in learning, teaching and assessment. I am delighted that the GEES subject centre has received a very positive review from the evaluator, Professor Harold Silver, as well as from relevant bodies and colleagues around the country.

Over the past year we have participated in national and international events including conferences on topics such as quality assessment and embedding careers education in the curriculum. We have also contributed to a variety of workshops on subjects ranging from disabilities and fieldwork to motivating students.

Although the main remit of LTSN-GEES is to work at national level, our staff have also been active locally. Most of this work has been discipline-based within the Faculty of Science, where we have provided six learning and teaching workshops. However, we have also contributed to other University initiatives, such as the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning projects in engineering and those at Seale-Hayne.

We’re now looking forward to a busy and productive second year and I’d like to encourage staff who want to know more, or those with suggestions for future activities, to contact us at info@gees.ac.uk, or visit us on the fifth floor of the Moneycentre in Plymouth.

While our centre is focused primarily on geography, geology and environmental sciences, we are part of the wider network. So, if you’ve yet to make contact with the subject centre for your own discipline I encourage you to visit the website at www.ltsn.ac.uk for more details.
I first became interested in the work of the Coastguard just over a year ago. Having been a gardener at the Exmouth campus for 17 years, I was looking for something new and challenging to do outside working hours.

I applied for a position with the Exmouth Coastguard and was overwhelmed by how much there was to learn, from the phonetic alphabet and radio procedures to different types of search and rescue. Making the public aware of the dangers of the sea and cliffs is also an important part of the job.

We meet every Monday night for care and maintenance, which involves thorough checks of every piece of equipment. Everything from harnesses, ropes and helmets right down to the first aid kit needs to be checked – there’s no room for errors.

We also carry out a two-hour patrol every Sunday, monitoring local seafronts, campsites and dock areas.

Once a month we have a training evening, which can involve anything from a full-scale set up of a cliff rescue or search, to life saving and first aid training, including mouth-to-mouth and cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Cliff training for the first time was an unforgettable experience – having to lower myself backwards from the top of a 150 ft cliff, kitted out with harness, main line and safety line and nothing to hold on to!

Life as a coastguard can be quiet at times, but very rewarding when the action starts. An average day might involve a ten-minute false alarm, or a full search lasting days. Last year, we were called to a search for a skipper overboard at 20.00. We stood down at 1.40 and had to be up three hours later to resume the search at first light. I was back on campus at 11.00 to cut the grass!

On another occasion, the team went to rescue a teenage girl who had fallen 50 ft down a cliff face, landing just above a 100 ft sheer drop. A crew member had to go down and secure her to his harness until the Coastguard helicopter arrived to winch her up to safety, with most of the nearby Sandy Bay campsite watching his every move! The work is voluntary, but the end product, hopefully a life saved, makes it all worthwhile.
People’s eating habits have changed dramatically in recent years, thanks to on-line and 24-hour shopping, and a shift away from family dining to convenience food and TV dinners. The food and drinks industry has had to respond to changing demands (for example by introducing a whole range of ‘ready meals’ in individual portion sizes) whilst ensuring stringent food safety and hygiene standards - and remaining competitive.

The food and drinks industry is vital to the South West, contributing more than £3 billion to the regional economy and employing more than 91,000 people in 3,400 companies. The South West Regional Development Agency (RDA) commissioned researchers at Seale-Hayne’s Agrifood Centre for Expertise to investigate how these companies could benefit from new technologies and business practices.

The research, led by Richard Shepherd, director of the Agrifood Centre, is now complete and the RDA is publishing the resulting, comprehensive report on how technology is revolutionising the food and drinks industry.

One of the new processes to emerge involves cryogenics – more commonly associated with media stories of people wanting to freeze their bodies after death, so that they can be brought back to life in the future if science manages to ‘overcome’ death. In food processing, cryogenic tumbling allows successful freezing of foods with a sauce, such as lasagne.

It’s also the technology which allows frozen peas to be poured out of a packet one by one rather than as a solid lump; they’ve been individually quick frozen – which is the other name for cryogenic tumbling.

New technology can also come to the aid of companies struggling to recruit people to carry out repetitive and dull production line jobs, such as sandwich-making. Intelligent automated systems can produce ‘robot’ assembly lines, which are already widely used in car manufacturing.

Other developments include new packaging which helps to prolong a product’s shelf-life, rather than just acting as a wrapping.

There are many more examples than it’s possible to mention here – although not all of them will be suited to all types of company – some for example, require a high capital outlay, which could make investment difficult for small companies.

As a result of this research, staff at the Agrifood Centre of Expertise plan to establish a forum with demonstration facilities which will help companies across the region to keep abreast of and adopt relevant new technology and business practices. The University’s Agrifood Centre at Seale-Hayne and Institute of Digital Arts & Technology would have a key role to play in this.
n Academic staff at Seale-Hayne are taking part in a series of national projects which have been commissioned to inform future UK and EU agricultural policy. The Countryside Agency has awarded the University £35,000 for a project researching the impact on farm families of the economic downturn in agriculture.

The Countryside Agency has awarded the University £35,000 for a project researching the impact on farm families of the economic downturn in agriculture. The project is led by Dr Matt Lobley and Sue Blackburn, both senior lecturers in countryside management in the Faculty of Land, Food and Leisure at the Seale-Hayne campus, and Dr Joan Chandler, head of sociology at the University of Plymouth. They are also working with Professor Michael Winter of the Countryside and Community Research Unit at the University of Gloucestershire (until recently Cheltenham and Gloucester College). Matt Reed has been appointed as a full-time senior researcher to carry out the year-long pilot study in Devon.

The study, which started in October, involves talking to every adult member in around 30 farming households, about the financial and personal shock caused by the crisis in farming. The project was planned long before the outbreak of the foot and mouth epidemic earlier this year. It will, though, be one of the first academic studies to take account of the impact of foot and mouth outbreak - on families in the region. This piece of work gives us an opportunity to properly explore the issue and make recommendations for the development of future agricultural policy. Most previous research in this area has focussed on economic and business decisions. We’re much more interested in what impact the so-called crisis in farming is having on families and their communities.

Farming families tend to be regarded as passive actors who can only respond to government policy. But actually their range of responses in the face of economic hardship can drive change in the countryside, and a better understanding of this could be useful to those who are responsible for developing rural policy.

Researchers are hoping to gain information about:
- why different people react differently in times of crisis
- the formal and informal networks family members use for support
- how individuals adapt and move on, and the implications this has for the rural economy and policy for rural areas.

According to Dr Lobley: There has, to date, been little or no systematic investigation of the impact of the downturn in farming including the foot and mouth outbreak - on families in the region. This piece of work gives us an opportunity to properly explore the issue and make recommendations for the development of future agricultural policy. Most previous research in this area has focussed on economic and business decisions. We’re much more interested in what impact the so-called crisis in farming is having on families and their communities.

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October's open day was a big success, attracting the highest number of prospective students for nearly five years.

Following Professor Rod Blackshaw's appointment as Dean, Professor Peter Brooks has been appointed head of research for the faculty.

A new pig breeding unit was delivered in October. The large prefabricated unit will be erected on the Seale-Hayne farm where it will become an integral part of research in this area.

Graduation day on 20 October saw more than 200 awards conferred, including honorary master of science degrees for Michael Dart and Geoffrey Hearnden. The ceremony took place in the Sports Hall at Seale-Hayne and graduates were joined by friends and family – one group had travelled from the Falklands to join the celebrations!

who recently received certificates in customer care and food hygiene. The awards were presented by director of Learning Facilities, Martin Berkien.

Staff changes…Liz Wells has replaced Tony Lopez as research co-ordinator of Humanities and Cultural Interpretation. Thanks go to Tony for all his hard work…Phil Norman is the new leader for PGCE (Secondary) English.

The Transition to HE Swap Shop on 31 October was well attended by staff from across the University and from partner colleges. The aim of the event was to assist and encourage the sharing of good practice in supporting student's transition to higher education, including pre-entry, induction and the first year. The organisers thank those who have already responded to the request for ideas for the way forward. Those who have yet to respond are encouraged to do so as soon as possible. More information is available on the website at www.plymouth.ac.uk/plymouth/learn/learning/transition.htm

Lesley Coulton, the University's head of sport and recreation, has been appointed as the South West's regional representative on the National Strategic Forum for the Institute of Sport and Recreation Management. In this role Lesley will represent the region on national boards and forums and in decision-making processes for the development of sport and recreation.
The project to refurbish the 1960s Davy Building moved on apace this year, with a new facility for environmental sciences on the fifth floor south.

The refurbishment programme started in 1991, with further work taking place in 1993, 1997, 1999 and 2000 as well as this year. So far, around 40% of the building’s laboratory and teaching space has been upgraded, at a total cost of £2.7 million.

It’s not the easiest of development jobs, as project manager Phil Greenwood explains: “We can only work during the summer holidays, as the refurbishment creates so much disruption. It would really be impossible with students around. As it is, however carefully we programme the work, it creates massive disruption for staff - and not just those in the immediate area affected, but those on the floors above and below too.

“We take out the old ceilings and ventilation systems and replace them with state-of-the-art equipment. Obviously, all equipment has to be moved out and stored elsewhere while a lab is undergoing refurbishment - that’s why there’s such a huge impact on so many staff. The end results are well worth it, though. We take out the old, wooden floors and benches and replace them with hard-wearing, long-life epoxy-resin and laminated furniture. This isn’t as susceptible to damage after a spillage, and is easier to keep clean. We also redesign the teaching areas, to make the most of available space. At the end of each project, staff and students have a fresher, brighter and modern environment for their studies.”

n Following the announcement of his retirement next summer, the Western Morning News interviewed Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Bull, about the rapid growth of the University. Since taking over as Vice-Chancellor in 1989, Professor Bull has steered the institution through the transition from polytechnic to university and seen it emerge confidently on the other side, said the article.

n A £700,000 donation to the Peninsula Medical School gained much coverage in the regional media. The money - which comes from London-based charity the Vandervell Foundation – will fund three four-year research fellowships. In an article in the Exeter Express & Echo Professor John Tooke, dean of the Medical School, said: “The Vandervell Foundation recognised that it was helping to establish the first medical school in the UK for 30 years. It also saw that it was building on an already established reputation for medical research in the region. This is a huge vote of confidence and we are grateful for their vision and support.”
Come and see for yourself was the invitation to the autumn open days and over a thousand prospective students did! In fact record numbers attended the event in October, with some prospective students travelling from as far as Scotland and the Channel Islands. Many were accompanied by parents and friends.

The open days at Seale-Hayne, on 10 October, and Plymouth, Exeter and Exmouth, on 20 October, were heavily promoted through mailshots to schools and regional press and television advertising at a time when thousands are making choices and filling in their UCAS forms.

Thanks to everyone who was involved in the organisation, said John Griffiths, director of Marketing and Public Relations. It is essential that we continue to improve what we offer on the day as it is a great opportunity to win the hearts and minds of students in an increasingly competitive market place.

Hundreds of A-level biology students descended on the Plymouth campus recently. They came to see the Electron Microscopy Unit and use the equipment to take a close look at animal and plant cells.

During their visit, the groups of students – who had travelled from as far afield as Lyme Regis, Bideford and Penzance - were shown how to use electron microscopes to examine cells and tissues and how to prepare samples to obtain high resolution images which relate directly to their studies. Plymouth has one of the best electron microscopy units in the south of Britain and visiting students were impressed with the facilities.

EM Unit staff and researchers, Roy Moate, Peter Bond, Ross Kay and Joanne Kirkby put together an entertaining, informative programme aimed at helping the young biologists understand a key part of their syllabus. The encouraging feedback said it all.

A-level biology co-ordinator, Egguckland Community College, Plymouth: “Thanks again for a really useful electron microscopy day. It was quite an eye-opener for the students - I don’t think they realise how much the University has to offer.”

Head of biology, Grenville College, Bideford: “I would like to thank you for providing the opportunity for our students to see the electron microscopes first hand. There is no substitute for this and they certainly remember the things you were able to demonstrate, and the wonderful resources of your department.”

“it was quite an eye-opener for the students”
In the first of a series focusing on graduates excelling in their chosen careers, we talked to Sam Bitton, who is playing a crucial role in the quest to discover whether there is – or was – life on Mars.

Sam Bitton at Logica

Having graduated from the University just three years ago, Sam now has a top job with Logica, the company responsible for developing the mission-critical software for Beagle2, the British-led effort to land on Mars.

As Sam explains: “The Beagle2 project is named after HMS Beagle, the ship on which Charles Darwin travelled as a naturalist. The outcome of his voyages was On the Origin of Species, which revolutionised our idea of life. The lander destined for Mars as part of the European Space Agency’s Mars Express Mission will carry the instruments necessary to search for the signs of life on the planet.”

Sam, who came to the University from France and studied electronic engineering here, has been working on the project for just over a year.

“Logica’s software will be used in the entry, descent, landing and deployment phases of the mission. I am responsible for software coding and have written and tested the assembler code for the most critical part of the software for the probe,” says Sam. “My job also involves software detailed design and project administration. This is an incredibly exciting project and I feel very lucky to have been able to get involved with it so early in my career. Many things I learned during my time at Plymouth have already been very useful.”

For more information about Beagle2, visit the website at www.beagle2.com
With the recent arrival of a new head of Educational Development (ED), Sue Burkill, it was an opportune time to meet the team and find out more about its remit.

Based in the Moneycentre, ED is a small team playing a big part in the University and its mission to be a world-class university. The team is focussed on building on the University’s nationally recognised strengths in learning and teaching to help create an innovative and effective learning environment.

ED’s primary role is to support the academic community across the University by providing guidance on issues relating to learning, teaching and assessment. “We aim to provide stimulating and encouraging support for those who are new to teaching through our courses and workshops,” says Sue. In fact, the whole team is involved in the postgraduate certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (LTHE), led by Rachael Carkett.

The team believes that it is important to recognise the development needs of support staff, including technicians and graduate teaching assistants who work closely with students. Short courses that can lead to a qualification are available.

The Learning Skills Support service, led by John Hilsdon, is there to help develop student learning skills. As John explains, “Such skills might include essay-writing, time management and note-making.”

Not surprisingly, there is much interest in how technology supports teaching and learning across the University. “The key issue is to find out where and how technology can add value to the learning experience,” says Jon Yorke, leader of the embedding learning technologies module. Anyone with an interest in using technology in their teaching should visit the website at www.elt2.net.

In addition to supporting institution-wide initiatives such as student centred learning, ED is committed to continuing to improve practice by attracting internal and external funding for research and development projects. Penny Fowler-Braund establishes and collaborates in research on learning and teaching in HE and is able to support and advise staff wishing to engage in research of this nature.

“Under its previous leader, Hazel Fullerton, ED built a strong national profile and we intend to maintain this,” says Sue. “Hazel has taken a national role as co-chair of SEDA, the Staff Education and Development Association. She and Roger Catchpole are continuing to contribute to the team’s work on a part-time basis.”

Educational Development can be contacted on ext 2345 or via email at ed@plymouth.ac.uk. To find out more about the team and its activities check out www.educationaldevelopment.net.

Spending time in Canada and Hong Kong as a child undoubtedly encouraged Sue Burkill’s interest in geography. This is the subject she has taught, and trained teachers in, for more than 20 years.

Prior to joining the University as the head of Educational Development, Sue was director of the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the College of St Mark and St John in Plymouth.

I came to learning and teaching support through my interest in learning and teaching my own subject, she says. With both my children now in the sixth form the time was right to move on professionally. My new post presents a fresh challenge and I am delighted that the Department of Geographical Sciences has enabled me to continue to do a small amount of undergraduate teaching.

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An engineering graduate has put the University into the finals at the Science, Engineering & Technology (SET) Student of the Year Awards for the second year running.

David Boden (below), who graduated with an honours degree in Marine Systems Technology in July, won the Lloyds Register Award for the Best Maritime Technology Student for an innovative project on reducing damage caused by the wash from high-speed boats. The study, carried out in Plymouth Sound and its estuaries, earned David first prize of £500 and £1000 for the Department of Mechanical and Marine Engineering (DMME).

David, 51, is the oldest student to have been selected for the prestigious national awards. Having already enjoyed a very successful career, both at sea and on-shore, he decided at the age of 48 to pursue a degree leading to Chartered Engineer status. He was awarded a scholarship by the HMS Worcester Marine Society and gained direct entry to the second year of the course. Now working as a commissioning manager at Devonport Dockyard, he hopes to eventually work for the Royal Navy, who provided invaluable assistance with the winning project.

The SET awards were established in 1998 as a forum for raising the status of technology and showcasing the abilities of students in their chosen field. The World Leadership Forum Ltd, organisers of the event, said: "The projects entered this year encapsulate the best research and analysis currently being undertaken at British universities, and several have produced genuine scientific advances that will have real benefits for British industry in the future." Plymouth was the only 'new' university to receive an award in this year.

Hailed by its sponsors as the foremost course of its kind in the country, the Challenge of Rural Leadership course is to run at the Faculty of Land, Food and Leisure at Seale-Hayne for the sixth consecutive year.

The two-week course, which takes place during November, will be attended by senior staff from a broad range of backgrounds linked to rural businesses – and some participants will be travelling from as far as Australia to attend.

"We are delighted that the response has been so good again this year, given the serious problems in agriculture not only in the UK but elsewhere around the world," said course director Richard Soffe. "The course has continued to adapt and improve with increasing emphasis on the strategic issues affecting the industry."

Richard recently returned from the USA, where he gained a scholarship to attend Harvard's leadership educators programme alongside educators from ten different countries. "Harvard was excellent," says Richard. "With global participation and the opportunity to share best practice, it will help us to further modify our leadership modules and courses to encompass the best in the world."

Richard can be contacted on ext 5669 or via email: r.soffe@plymouth.ac.uk.
20 November - 21 December

Sea-escapes – an exhibition by Toby Ray, former Plymouth College of Art and Design student, at the Sherwell Centre. “Being a keen surfer makes me want to create paintings of empty beaches where the surf is always good and fun times are had.” Contact: Toby Ray via email: toby-dray@yahoo.com or visit www.geocities.com/tobyray/ for more information. The Sherwell Centre is open Monday to Friday from 9 am to 7 pm.

21 November

Higher education for all - your questions answered: conference featuring talks on widening participation, the Peninsula Medical School and 'the road ahead' for HE. Robbins Centre (9.30 am - 4 pm). Contact: Liz Bell on ext 3987.

Rural issues – the Church's response and role now and in the future – a seminar in the Hayter Centre. "Being a keen surfer makes me want to create paintings of empty beaches where the surf is always good and fun times are had.” Contact: Toby Ray via email: toby-dray@yahoo.com or visit www.geocities.com/tobyray/ for more information. The Sherwell Centre is open Monday to Friday from 9 am to 7 pm.

22 November

HRH The Princess Royal visits the Seale-Hayne campus. In her capacity as Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers, Princess Anne will be guest speaker at the annual farm management lecture. (By invitation only.)

The Apache helicopter - an IEE lecture presented by Mike Kennet from Westland Helicopters in Lecture Theatre 5, Babbage Building, at 7 pm. The lecture will present an insight into the latest technologies behind helicopter design. Contact: Poppy Rhone on 07909 880839/email: p.rhodes@plymouth.ac.uk.

28 November

Global diversity – a Department of Biological Sciences seminar by Dr Kevin Gaston, University of Sheffield, in Lecture Theatre 6, Babbage Building, at 1 pm. The talk will discuss the patterns in the diversity of organisms, and the processes which generate them. Contact: David Bilton on ext 2902.

Africa’s forgotten beach – exploring the shoreline of Lake Malawi – an Exploration Biology talk by Tooni Mahto in Room 310, Davy Building, at 1 pm. Exploration Biology talks present the broad spectrum of work carried out by staff and students and reflect the range of exotic locations they have visited. Tooni will recount her canoe trip along the shoreline to Lake Malawi, one of Africa’s large lakes. Contact: Pete Smithers on ext 2956.

30 November, 7 and 14 December

Just for staff: some thoughts about Advent in preparation for Christmas - Chaplaincy, Sherwell Lane, between 12.30 and 1 pm. Bring your lunch; tea and coffee will be provided. Contact: Barry Hallett on ext 2261.

5 December

What use is estuarine macrobenthos? Biodiversity and ecosystem function – a Department of Biological Sciences seminar by Dr Mark Huxham, University of Bristol, in Lecture Theatre 6, Babbage Building, at 1 pm. The seminar will discuss the ecological role of estuarine invertebrates and how species diversity influences the way these ecosystems work. Contact: David Bilton on ext 2902.

A theory of perspective in quantitative descriptions: logic meets consumer psychology - a seminar by Professor Tony Stanford, University of Glasgow, in the Lynher Room, Babbage Building, at 4 pm. Contact: Kenny Coventry on ext 3182.

6 December

The 2001/02 IEE Michael Faraday Lecture: Smart living @ home with technology, at Plymouth Pavilions, 7 pm. Imagine a house that knows if you’re ill, re-orders the ice cream when you run out and obtains the latest video release for you. Science fiction or just around the corner? Contact: Peter White on ext 2594.

15 January

Gender differences in academic careers – a talk by Pam Jacobs, Department of Psychology, in Room 215, Mary Newman Building, at 1 pm. The talk reports data from a survey carried out in UK universities on gender differences in academic careers. Contact: Pam Jacobs on ext 3139.
Marco Island, Florida – Attractive 2 bedroom apartment, well equipped kitchen, large lounge/diner, balcony with harbour views in lovely harbourside complex with pools, Jacuzzis and sports facilities. Beautiful sub-tropical island with stunning beaches and 330 days sunshine. Good access to Miami, Key West and Orlando. Rental £350 week, sleeps 6. Contact Gerri Clay, Senior Lecturer, IHS on 01823 366900 or 01823 277801. Email: johngerriclay@hotmail.com / visit website at www.florida-apartment.co.uk

Jan’95 M reg Rover 218 Turbo-Diesel 5 door. MOT until Sept’02. Taxed until end July ’02 Full Rover service history, 74,500 miles. Offers around £2,500. PLY 3076/85 or 01364 72832 evenings.

FLAT TO RENT. St Judes. 1 large double bedroom, large lounge and fitted kitchen. Fully furnished to a high standard. Double-glazed. GCH. Off-road parking. £350/month. Contact Richard x3945.

Calling all staff working with 14 to 16 year olds in schools!

Take a look at www.gr8choice.org - launched on 26 November - and then spread the word. This new website has been designed to raise awareness of higher education opportunities and is part of the Peninsula Project, a collaborative widening participation initiative.

There will be more information about widening participation activities in future editions of UPfront.

I don't mind being badgered for charitable donations, but frog marched as well...!

David Plane from the Department of Mechanical and Marine Engineering is the winner of our caption competition. His caption, above, wins him a £20 music voucher.

Thanks to everyone who entered. Look out for more competitions soon!