Dr Samantha King (front row, right) was jointly awarded the British International Studies Association's prize for best PhD thesis. Dr King, a single mother of four, is pictured here with her father and son (back row) and Drs Claire Heristchi and Mike Pugh from the School of Sociology, Politics and Law.

Copy deadline for the next issue is 5 April 2004.
Please send all items to Paola Simoneschi, Marketing & Public Relations Department, 6 Portland Villas, Plymouth campus
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Welcome to the March/April edition of UPfront.

If you have any feedback or ideas for future editions, please contact Paola Simoneschi, Public Relations Manager, on ext 3986/paola.simoneschi@plymouth.ac.uk

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GIRL POWER!

Front cover: Plymouth is seeing a big increase in female students on its surveying and construction courses.

Other universities should follow Plymouth’s lead of tackling the gender bias that has dominated the construction industry, according to recent comments from the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the leading professional body that represents 110,000 chartered surveyors worldwide.

The University has recruited a record number of women to its surveying and construction courses this year, resulting in a 31 per cent increase in the number of female students studying degrees in that area – an achievement RICS views as ‘highly commendable’.

“As it stands, female membership of RICS is only ten per cent, and some other construction-related fields are even lower. So it seems the industry is fishing from only half the pool of talent, and is clearly missing out on attracting and retaining some of the brightest and the best,” said Matthew McKaig, Regional Director for RICS in the South West.

“We are delighted that the University of Plymouth is contributing to this agenda through actively seeking to attract more women to its programmes.”

Sue Turpin-Brooks, Admissions Tutor at the University, said: “Getting a better balance between men and women on our courses is vitally important for our industry, which offers outstanding career opportunities for men and women alike.

“It is particularly pleasing that we have been able to build on our excellent reputation in this way, but what we really want is for our success to be repeated elsewhere.”

To find out more about the University’s surveying and construction courses, contact Paul Murray, Principal Lecturer, on 01752 233655/email: paul.murray@plymouth.ac.uk

If you want to challenge yourself, improve your skills, give something back to society or simply make new friends, why not invest some time as a volunteer in the local community? The University’s Active in Communities team would like to hear from you if...

…you are interested in helping to conserve the environment on a voluntary basis. Active in Communities is aiming to establish a taskforce of staff volunteers to make a one-off commitment to a local conservation project.

…you have leadership and management experience. Active in Communities has joined forces with Partners in Leadership – part of Business in the Community – which matches professionals with leadership and management experience with leaders of social and community enterprises. The partners are encouraged to work together on leadership issues and find solutions to the business challenges they face. The programme is funded by Jaguar and the Social Enterprise Unit of the Department of Trade & Industry and therefore has no financial implications for participants.

To find out more about these opportunities and others, contact Tess Nixon, HE Active in Communities Development Worker, on ext 3323/email: tess.nixon@plymouth.ac.uk

Wise Investment

If you have any feedback or ideas for future editions, please contact Paola Simoneschi, Public Relations Manager, on ext 3986/paola.simoneschi@plymouth.ac.uk

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More women are choosing Plymouth’s construction and surveying degrees.
A nutrition expert who was involved in the popular BBC programme *Diet Trials* – and gave expert advice on Channel 4’s *The Big Breakfast* – has taken up her role as leader of the University’s new dietetics degree.

Anne de Lacy (right), the first Professor of Dietetics in the country, said she chose Plymouth because of the ‘unique potential of the BSc (Hons) Dietetics course. Student dietitians at Plymouth will work and study alongside people from a wide range of related healthcare professions, which will create a truly multi-professional dimension to their studies and thus benefit their working lives.

Plymouth beat stiff competition from several other universities in the region to launch the dietetics degree on behalf of the NHS and its students will benefit patients throughout the West Country. Around 50 students a year are expected to enrol, with the first intake due to start this September. Clinical placements are likely to extend throughout the South West, stretching from Cheltenham and Gloucester to Dorset and Cornwall.

Although the core programme will be delivered on the Plymouth campus, nutrition and food science will be taught in the region. Students will benefit from the University’s strong links with the health sector.

The University’s new library management system, Voyager, went live at the end of January. This marked the end of the first phase of implementation, replacing the basic functionality of the previous system, Libertas.

Prospective landlords (left) meet Chris Holt, Manager of Central Park Towers, and Mary Simpson, Student Accommodation Manager. A University event bringing together current and prospective student landlords was hailed a big success after almost 200 of them attended.

The evening event, organised by the University’s Accommodation Service, attracted landlords currently registered with the University and those interested in renting accommodation to students in the future.

The guests were addressed by Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Resources) Professor Peter Evans, Student Accommodation Manager Mary Simpson and Head of the Private Rented Sector at Plymouth City Council Linda Johns and had the opportunity to mingle and enjoy some refreshments.

“The event was a great opportunity for the exchange of a lot of useful information and we received some very positive feedback. We are looking to make this an annual event,” said Michael Paisley, Assistant Student Accommodation Manager.

The University has more than 1,000 properties and just under 5,000 rooms on its approved accommodation lists, all of which are inspected by officers annually.

Beating a vibrant ‘brain coral’ front-cover design, the University’s 2005 undergraduate prospectus is now available.

“The prospectus has a strong, contemporary look which will stand out at higher education conventions and in school libraries,” said Schools Liaison Officer, Nicola Ayer. “The course pages follow a well-tested layout that will enable students to access essential information quickly and easily.”

To obtain a copy of the new prospectus, telephone Course Enquiries on 01752 232323/ email: prospectus@plymouth.ac.uk

The prospectus is also available on-line at www.plymouth.ac.uk
The University and Devon & Cornwall Constabulary are working in partnership to provide a safer campus in a safer city.

The two organisations have signed an official agreement that aims to enhance links between the local community, the police and the University.

"The police and University staff will work together to highlight and maintain the safe environment for study that the University of Plymouth has to offer. This is a great opportunity," said John Isaac, Chief Superintendent of Devon & Cornwall Constabulary.

The new University card will be available to all staff and students and, although it's not compulsory to have one, from September you will need it to enter the extended library and 24/7 IT facilities as well to borrow books. Your card will also give the proof of identity needed to claim discounts available to staff and students. In the longer-term, you will need it to enter the increasing number of buildings to be protected by access control systems, and it will act as your print/copy card.

A dedicated card office in the Davy Building will be producing the cards between April and September, and all existing staff and students will shortly receive notification of the arrangements for getting their card. Please don’t leave it until the last minute to respond, or you may find yourself without a card for the beginning of the new academic year.

No 2309 Squadron of the Air Training Corps has officially become ‘2309 (University of Plymouth) Squadron’ – the first modern-day squadron to bear the name of a university. At an official ceremony at the Plymouth campus, Vice-Admiral Sir John Coward presented the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Roland Levinsky, and Fit Lt John Bewley, Commanding Officer of the Squadron, with the documents bearing the new name.

"We are delighted with the relationship the Squadron and the University of Plymouth have developed over the years. We feel very privileged to be awarded the distinction of bearing the University’s name," said Fit Lt John Bewley.

Plymouth is unique among UK universities in accommodating an air cadet squadron on its premises. Air Training Corps meetings have taken place on the Plymouth campus area since the Squadron’s inception in 1951 and in 2002 the University invested £20,000 in a new HQ building for the cadets in Cobourg Street.

"We’re delighted with what we’ve produced," said Paul Murray, Director of SLICE. "The toolkits work well because they’re produced by subject specialists for subject specialists and are transferable and adaptable. They’re a wonderful resource for hard-pressed academics and are receiving almost rapturous applause as we travel around the country to promote them."

The SLICE team recognises that the materials have a wide application and Paul and his colleagues are happy to provide further details - contact Tracey Webber, Project Administrator, on 01752 233655/ email: tracey.webber@plymouth.ac.uk
David Evans (below) joined the University’s Chaplaincy team last September. No stranger to the world of education, he works as a chaplain at Lancashire Polytechnic (now the University of Central Lancashire) and then at two further education colleges in Scunthorpe after completing his four-year training as a Baptist minister.

Prior to coming to Plymouth, 46-year-old David, who is married with three daughters, spent five years as minister of an inner-city church in the Black Country. His return to chaplaincy work was prompted by the desire to ‘meet more ordinary people’ and he knew he’d find the environment of the University ‘particularly stimulating’.

David also sees a role for Chaplaincy in ‘filling the gaps’, holding events in support of occasions such as World Holocaust Day, for example.

“In addition, there’s the Staff Christian Fellowship, which meets regularly to chat and pray or listen to a visiting speaker. We have members from across the Plymouth campus and always welcome newcomers.”

The team is based at Chaplaincy House in Sherwell Lane. To find out more, including information about weekend and evening activities, such as ten-pin bowling and group walks, log on to www.plymouth.ac.uk/chaplaincy or telephone ext 2261.
Scientists have announced a £1.7 million project looking at the relationship between human lifestyles and the marine environment that may affect the future of our seas.

Professor Laurence Mee, Associate Head (Research) of the School of Earth, Ocean & Environmental Sciences, is heading a consortium of 27 institutions from across Europe in the three-year European Lifestyles and Marine Ecosystems (ELME) research project.

The consortium beat off competition from other high-profile groups to be awarded the funding by the European Union 6th Framework Programme.

“Europe’s seas are already in bad shape as a result of overfishing, pollution and habitat destruction,” said Professor Mee. “In fact almost everything we do can have an impact on the sea—the problem is we may not realise the consequences until it is too late.

“The future of marine ecosystems in the Baltic, Black, Mediterranean and North East Atlantic Seas will be decided by how well people understand the relationships between their lifestyles and their ‘footprint’ on the sea—and how far they are prepared to go in order to protect this vital heritage.”

The consortium will start by researching the relationship between existing problems and human activities, which poses difficult questions. For example, to what extent does the development of coastal areas and mass tourism destroy marine habitats, and how effectively are we controlling new pollutants?

“This project will inform the public and policymakers and help develop strategies to protect marine life and exploit the sea in a sustainable manner,” said Professor Mee. “This is not about ‘doom and gloom’ though—it is about giving the sea its rightful place as a key part of Europe’s future.

The University’s Centre for Theoretical & Computational Neuroscience (CTCN) is a new research centre set up to help advance understanding of the structure, function and development of the brain in health and disease, which is perhaps the greatest challenge facing scientists today.

Understanding the brain is essential for alleviating enormous health problems such as mental illness, memory loss, drug abuse, and many forms of brain disease. It also has important implications for advancing information and computing technology.

Professor Mike Denham heads the CTCN, which has five other academic members of staff—Professors Chris Harris, Roman Borsuk and Jochen Braun, and Drs Thomas Wennekers and Sue Denham.

The Centre is expanding and currently has three postdoctoral researchers and 11 PhD students. Areas covered include attention and learning in humans, how music and speech are perceived, how information is processed in the brain, understanding hearing and vision, and the detection and understanding of movement disorders caused by abnormalities in the brain.

The movement group, led by Professor Chris Harris, is currently studying neurometabolic diseases (genetic disorders that cause problems with brain metabolism) in children. These diseases are progressive and can be fatal without the right treatment.

“The CTCN is unique in that it brings together international experts in theoretical and computational neuroscience and those with experimental expertise,” said Professor Denham. “This allows a ‘systems approach’ in which the goal is to understand how different parts of the brain and different circuits work, or don’t work, together.”

A series of research seminars organised by the Centre is running from March to June. All are welcome. For further details, visit the news and events section of the University website at www.plymouth.ac.uk or contact Faith Budge on ext 2707/email: faith.budge@plymouth.ac.uk
Learning and Teaching Support Network. “This is important as it reflects on the students’ experience and achievements to date.

“There is also an expectation that all institutions will develop their employability processes so that students are well prepared for interviews, for example. Skills Plus highlights the benefits of promoting synergies between all these factors.

“We are trying to celebrate and share the good processes that were already in place but also support and encourage those degree programmes that may have further to go than others.”

For more information about Skills Plus, contact Professor Chalkley on 01752 233531/email: brian.chalkley@plymouth.ac.uk

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postgradchat @plymouth

University staff chatted with prospective postgraduate students in cyberspace recently, when Plymouth became the first UK university to hold a Virtual Open Day.

The event, organised through Prospects – a company which, like the University, is keen to experiment with news ways of providing information to postgraduate students – attracted 650 people to the University’s website and 82 people entered two streams of chatrooms. One of these streams was hosted by academic staff responding to queries about opportunities in their fields, while the other involved staff answering general questions.

The Virtual Open Day was featured on the BBC website, and Prospects will keep the edited transcript of it on their website (www.prospects.ac.uk) for 18 months.

“Staff from across the University worked together to make this event a success,” said Dr Joan Chandler, Head of the Graduate School. “It was my first experience of participating in a chatroom as I answered a query about PhD study. It was slightly strange conversing with people called Panda or Fraggle, but I assume this is part of the virtual future!”

For more information about postgraduate study, contact the Graduate School on 01752 232786/email: GraduateSchool@plymouth.ac.uk

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A University-wide strategy for enhancing students’ skills, personal development and employability is now in the final stages of implementation.

Skills Plus, which aims to prepare undergraduate and postgraduate students for the world of work, was launched in June last year and staff are being encouraged to take advantage of the related programme of staff support and guidance available.

The initiative has been developed in line with the University’s Widening Participation Strategy and is mindful of the needs of an increasingly diverse student population.

“By September 2005, all universities are expected to have developed personal development and planning strategies for their students,” said Professor Brian Chalkley, Director of the

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HEARTS came about as a result of a pilot project – carried out in the West Midlands – that drew together higher education institutions (HEIs), schools and local education authorities to engage student teachers, teachers and school pupils, as well as arts workers and artists, in a range of small-scale projects.

HEIs that provide initial teacher education can now bid for funding projects – three in the first year and three in the second.

“Many schools report that the arts are becoming ever more marginalised. In consequence, primary initial teacher education has tended to reduce the time and intensity of treatment in the arts for students who are principally concerned with meeting the standards in the core subjects,” said Professor Newby, who has been at the forefront of HEARTS from the outset.

“It’s taken a long time, but policy-makers have now woken up to what many have been telling them: that this slow erosion of the experience of the arts in the primary phase is damaging and – unless something is done – will leave new teachers under-equipped to handle children’s needs in the future.”

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“As well as looking for projects that are exciting in their own right, we hope that engagement with HEARTS will impact on initial teacher training in wider terms,” said Professor Newby. “Above all, the intention of HEARTS is to try to relocate the arts centrally in the experience of student teachers in the primary phase and help to reconstruct a curriculum that many have felt has, over recent years, been focussed too narrowly.”

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Plymouth’s impressive work in meeting the needs of disabled students was acknowledged in an article in the Times Higher Education Supplement, which stated that Disability ASSIST Services (DAS) is “leading the field” in this area. As well as helping academic staff to support students with special needs, DAS pays particular attention to identifying dyslexia. Staff are therefore trained to recognise the symptoms and let students know help is available.

The University and its involvement in the planned ‘cultural quarter’ for Plymouth featured in the recent Big City, Big Future programme broadcast on local ITV. In the programme, Professor Peter Evans, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Resources), explained how the University is developing its main campus and the surrounding area in partnership with Plymouth City Council and other stakeholders.

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Pete Bradon, a research psychologist at the University, was one of the team that drew up the Best Companies survey, the results of which recently featured on The Times’ website. The results showed that, in general, women are happier at work than men. “Women report better well-being at all levels apart from senior management,” said Pete.

International relations experts Dr Neil Cooper and Dr Claire Heristchi were interviewed on BBC Radio Devon, Plymouth Sound and Pirate FM, following the publication of the Hutton Report. They gave their views on the report’s conclusions and their political implications.
**concerts**

**19 March**

8 pm, Main Hall, Plymouth campus
University of Plymouth Orchestra
Programme: Wagner: Die Meistersingers Overture; Mussorgsky: Excerpts from Pictures at an Exhibition; Vaughan Williams: Two Shakespeare Dances; Arr. Ling: Abba Medley. Admission free with a parting donation towards costs.

**20 March**

7.30 pm, St Andrew’s Church, Royal Parade, Plymouth
University of Plymouth Choral Society Spring concert with the Sherwell Chamber Orchestra led by Jonathan Hurdle
Soloists: ... Entrance of the Queen of Sheba. Tickets £7.50 (£5 concessions) from Plymouth Music Shop, Mayflower Street, Plymouth.

**27 March**

7.30 pm, Upper Lecture Theatre, Sherwell Centre, Plymouth campus
Plymouth Chamber Music: Nash Ensemble
Programme: Judith Weir: Piano Quartet ‘Distance and Enchantment’; Schumann: Piano ... students/registered unemployed) from the University Reception, by phoning Alice Li (ext 3988) or at the door on the night.

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**exhibitions**

Exhibitions take place in the Sherwell Centre, Plymouth campus. For details, email nicola.griffin@plymouth.ac.uk

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**conferences & workshops**

5 – 7 April
Robbins Conference Centre and Cookworthy Building, Plymouth campus
Discourse, Power, Resistance in Education. For details see www2.plymouth.ac.uk/conf/idpr

19 & 20 April
Joint Cozone/FloodRiskNet workshop: Long-term prediction of beach morphology. For details about the workshop see http://cozone.org.uk/meeting.htm or email john.lawrence@plymouth.ac.uk

21 & 22 April
Integrated Coastal Zone Management: Fact or Fiction? For details see www.science.plym.ac.uk/pass/PAS_SJC2M.htm or email rose.gillon@plymouth.ac.uk

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**small ads**

**AUSTRALIAN HOUSE SWAP**: Are you interested in a 2 – 3 week house and car swap with a couple in Mandurah (about half an hour from Perth)? The apartment has a beautiful sea view. Timing of swap by mutual arrangement. Please contact Jasmine Williams on 01752 232821/email: jasmine.williams@plymouth.ac.uk

**FOR SALE**: Academic gown. As new – worn once. Contact Brian on 01752 311330.

**TO LET**: Three-bedroomed terraced house in Peverell. Pleasant, quiet street adjacent to Central Park, a 20-minute walk from the main campus. £550 per month. Contact Alan on 01752 667805.

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**partnership**

The University of Plymouth Colleges (UPC) network is going from strength to strength, providing high quality dispersed education to serve its communities, widen participation and further economic development.

Recent graduates Elaine Cann, Nicola Murphy, Christine Long and Susan Isaac (right) are just one Partner College ‘success story’. The four achieved excellent results in HND Management at Exeter College and then progressed to the University to ‘top up’ to BA (Hons) Business and Administration. Between them, they notched up two firsts and two 2:1s.

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**good taste**

Isaac’s on the Plymouth campus is hosting a ‘curry club’ evening once a month, giving staff the chance to socialise and sample dishes from around the world.

These special themed evenings cost £5 per person, which buys a meal and a drink.

Forthcoming dates for your diary are:

- 26 March: Curry evening
- 23 April: Moroccan evening
- 25 June: Italian evening
- 27 August: Chinese evening

To book your place, call Dave Furniss on ext 2265/email: dave.furniss@plymouth.ac.uk

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**partnership pays off**

The group put their success down to ‘110 per cent’ commitment and the mutual support they were able to give each other, particularly during the car journey to and from Exeter. The last word goes to Nicola: “Be organised and believe in yourself and dreams really can come true!”

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**springboard**

The first group to complete Springboard, the personal development programme specifically designed for women, recently received their certificates.

If you’d like to be part of the next group to embark on the programme (scheduled to start in April), there are still places available.

The Staff Development team is also looking at running Springboard as eight half-day sessions over three months for women who cannot attend four full days.

In addition, the team is keen to run Navigator, a self-development programme for men run along similar lines to Springboard.

If you’d like more information about Springboard or Navigator, telephone Staff Development on ext 2475/email: staffdevelopment@plymouth.ac.uk

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