FROM ROCKETS TO ENRICHMENT: a culture of teaching at Plymouth University

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

OUR NEXT VICE-CHANCELLOR: an introductory interview with Professor Judith Petts

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE: the road to good governance

MARINE ACADEMY PLYMOUTH: five years in the making
A message from our Chair of the Board of Governors

When we set out on our journey to find a new Vice-Chancellor, we wanted to ensure that the voice of the University, of our people, was heard throughout the recruitment process. What did you ideally want in a new leader? What characteristics, style and ethos did you value the most?

Well, I think we can safely say that you’ve established a new benchmark in terms of engagement – and my thanks goes to everyone who played their part in a rigorous and thorough process. Together, I believe we have found an outstanding new leader, who will have the exciting task of building on the progress we have made over the last 12 months – not to mention the academic pedigree established over 150 years and more.

I believe we have a more inclusive culture now, and a leadership team that is more representative of, and receptive to, its people. But our work is not finished – good governance is an ongoing commitment and requires the input of everyone in the institution. It is up to all of us to hold each other to respectful account, and ensure that voice is heard at all times.

Best wishes
James

James Brent
Chairman of the Board of Governors

A message from our Interim Vice-Chancellor

It has been my privilege to have led our University for the past year, working with our executive team and Board of Governors to refocus both the immediate and longer-term priorities of the institution. We have made great progress – largely because of the readiness of staff across the University to support and engage with change and initiatives designed to improve what we do.

Now, with the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor, the next chapter of the University’s story is just around the corner. In February, Professor Judith Petts CBE will formally join us from Southampton, and, as you’ll see from her interview over the page, she is as excited as we are that she will be taking up the reins at Plymouth.

Until then, and with Judith’s blessing, we will continue to focus upon doing what we do best – providing a great teaching and learning experience for our students, and conducting ground-breaking, impact-led research.

In this issue, you’ll find stories that encapsulate that ‘core’: from creating a more immersive learning environment for students fresh to higher education to researching the fallout of Chernobyl’s radiation on amphibians. And there’s a special look at how the University has supported the development of Marine Academy Plymouth, becoming one of the genuine success stories for this city.

That and much more besides – enjoy the issue.

David

IN THIS ISSUE

04 | Professor Judith Petts: an introductory interview
06 | The road to good governance
08 | Graduation 2015: home sweet Hoe
10 | Teaching and learning: immersing students in higher education
14 | MAP-ping the future: five years in the making for Marine Academy Plymouth
18 | Analysing the fallout of radioactivity in the shadow of Chernobyl
20 | Spotlight: Antony Micallef, Dr Roy Lowry, Professor Bridie Kent and Maria Thaller
28 | Campus round-up
Q What have been your thoughts and feelings since it was confirmed that you would be Plymouth University’s next Vice-Chancellor?

It confirmed very much for me the excitement that I felt about the opportunity – and that has been underlined by the very positive way in which friends and peers have responded to the news, as well as the response from colleagues at Plymouth.

Q What’s your first impression of the institution?

It’s a very friendly and welcoming institution and, while I haven’t always been here when the students are, it feels a lively place with lots of great things going on. It’s large of course, especially in terms of the numbers of students, and it clearly has pockets of significant excellence. A key theme – one that has been reinforced by what colleagues at the University have said to me – is that we need to continue with the work that is being led by the executive to reinvigorate our institutional confidence and, in doing so, recapture that sense of what makes the University a great place for staff and students, a great partner for the city and business, and somewhere our alumni will continue to be proud to call ‘their’ institution. Some of this will come down to focus and to restating our strengths and aspirations.

Q Did anything in particular resonate with you from the interview process?

I got a strong sense of opportunity and the importance, therefore, of prioritisation so that the opportunity can be realised – but that’s not an issue that is unique to Plymouth. Also, while the University is among the post-’92 universities in terms of where it’s come from, it has an enviable and strong core of high-quality research, so there is a very real sense of sustaining that
excellence and how important it is to students and our research-led teaching. Lastly, there is the very real need to ensure financial sustainability, so that we can invest in the University, build upon its strengths, and ensure it can respond to an uncertain external environment.

**Q What will be your approach to the first 90 days of taking up the role?**

I’ve had the advantage of meeting a lot of people from the University already, and clearly there will be a lot more people that I will want and need to meet. I want to go out into the faculties, the schools and the professional services, and listen to colleagues talk about their achievements, their plans and their priorities. I want to start to meet our students, even if to begin with it is informally over a cup of coffee, and I want to go to the Students’ Union. I very much want to get a sense of what can be done and what needs to be done. The second thing I want to do is see how the portfolio review and the strategic implementation programmes are progressing. I know there has been a lot of work done by the executive group and the Board of Governors, and so I’ll be keen to see whether there is anything needed to support this work further to sharpen the strategy focus. Strategic plans cannot be cast in tablets of stone— they have to evolve—and so we’ll need to monitor the external and internal environment to ensure that our plan remains fresh, focused and challenging.

**Q What was it that led you to enter the world of academia?**

It was more a case of serendipity than being planned. I didn’t go into academia straight from university— I went out into business and came back to higher education when I was about 30. I had reached a point where I could see that what I’d gained myself could add value in a university environment. As it happened, my husband was moving to a new job in the Midlands, and an opportunity came up at Nottingham that was in my field of environmental management and assessment.

**Q What would you say was your proudest moment so far?**

Apart from being appointed Vice-Chancellor, I would have to say in 2012 when I was appointed CBE in The Queen’s New Year Honours List for services to scientific research. It was a huge honour and privilege and something I’ll never forget. And to know that the nomination comes in the first place from your peers makes it even more special.

**Q What’s your assessment of the HE sector?**

I think we’re in for an uncertain and tough time, and that’s not unique to the university sector because it will affect the whole of government and beyond. In terms of higher education, we are awaiting the news of the Teaching Excellence Framework, the review of the research councils, and the Comprehensive Spending Review. We’re expecting a Green Paper on higher education, which will influence the future structure and funding of the sector. So there’s a great deal we don’t know, and a great deal we can guess, but I think it’s going to be challenging. For any university, and certainly for Plymouth, we have to ensure that we prioritise and focus on what we are good at to put us in a position to be proactive in the face of the changes.

**Q Have you taken a view on the strategic direction of the University?**

The University has obviously put a lot of work into its strategic implementation plan and portfolio review, and this is absolutely right. As an institution we need to focus in on what is good, particularly our research and teaching excellence, and to maintain that we will need to consider how we invest in it. We also need to make sure that we’re focused on translating our research into research-led teaching as teaching excellence is of paramount importance to our strategy and positioning. I also think the University’s research institutes can play an important role in providing opportunities for interdisciplinary research, which is where we will expect to see growing opportunities for funding, particularly around global challenges. In terms of enterprise, and Plymouth being ‘the’ enterprise university, it’s probably better articulated as an ‘enterprising’ university. Personally, I like a concept of enterprise that is like an ecosystem, where everything we do— whether engaging in national debates, contributing evidence to government policy-making, or working with business— comes from a broad base that everyone on campus can relate to. For example, the opportunity around public engagement is part of a spectrum of activities that makes us connected and so I would say that we should aim to be a connected, engaged and enterprising university.

**Q How are you looking forward to moving to the South West? Is it an area of the country you know already?**

That’s an easy one! I’m a graduate of Exeter, I met my husband there, and we have lifelong friends in the area. Two years ago we bought a house in East Devon, so we’d already decided we wanted to live in the South West. And my oldest friend lives in Cornwall, so I know quite a lot about the area and I’m looking forward to finding the bits of the South West Coast Path I’ve not yet walked along.
Good governance is fundamental to every successful organisation,” says James Brent, Chairman of the Board of Governors, reflecting on the journey the University has been on over the past 18 months – one that has involved external review and internal reform in equal measure. “Clearly there were some painful lessons learned last year, but we’ve endeavoured to address them in an open and transparent manner so that we better restore confidence among those who look to the University as educator, employer and anchor institution in the South West.”
When James stepped into the role of Chair in October last year, he knew that the first steps on the path to reform needed to be taken under the watchful gaze of external experts. So, together with the wider leadership team, they invited the Good Governance Institute to conduct a thorough report, not just of governance but processes, systems, culture and behaviours as well.

By March of this year, in anticipation of the report’s publication, the Governance Improvement Programme (GIP) was launched, led by Vice-Chair of the Board, Margaret Schwarz. Consisting of governors, staff and students, it set about creating a framework of engagement based on openness, honesty, trust, probity and respectful challenge, with the aim of ultimately providing the assurance and confidence that the University was being well-run and making good decisions.

This was crucial for the student body, for whom the term ‘transparency’ had become a watchword in 2014. Ruth Titmus, President of the University of Plymouth Students’ Union, said: “In the minds of many students, issues of governance and financial accountability were rolled into one. Some students were totally unaware of the issues: others were confused and concerned about the reports they were hearing but really didn’t know who to speak to. And then there were those who were vocal and disgruntled by what was appearing in the media, and they wanted answers.”

When the review was published, the GIP began to work through the 15 key recommendations. Professor David Coslett, who had been appointed by the Board to take over the interim roles of Chief Executive and, later, Vice-Chancellor, had already identified two critical areas to address – the need to establish a more representative academic leadership and the need to strengthen the academic voice across the institution.

He said: “Academic leadership needed to focus on the idea of ‘one university’ where Board, executive, staff and students each have a sense of shared goals and an understanding of the part they play in delivering them.”

Early steps were taken to expand the renamed ‘University Executive Group’ to include Executive Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors, and a project launched to strengthen the Academic Board function and replace it with a new Senate.

Dr Mike Sheaff, an Academic Staff Representative on the Board for the past seven years, said: “It was important that the report highlighted the need for a stronger academic voice, especially when it comes to making those decisions that relate to quality in teaching and research. It’s also important that all staff are engaged in decisions about delivering that quality.”

For Mike, one line from the report stands out in particular: ‘Good governance requires more than the development of processes, since it is built on strong relationships, honest dialogue and mutual respect’. “I think progress has been made,” he said, “but the real potential of these improvements will only be achieved if we give at least equal attention to behaviours. Of course there are different practices across the University, but there must be a common adherence to core and guiding principles. This is about culture and behaviours and relationships, and they must be worked on consistently.”

Improving the understanding and perceptions of governance at the University was also an important task, and the team has worked hard to clarify the roles and responsibilities of key decision-making bodies, such as through the publication of the terms of reference. The role of University Secretary has been extended and reinforced, and there has also been a commitment to ensure greater visibility of governance by sharing as much information as possible through external webpages and internal communications channels. Minutes of Board meetings are now available on the website and a summary of University Executive Group decisions is regularly made available to staff.

The Board of Governors itself has undergone reform to better ensure appropriate skills, knowledge and experience, and alignment with sector best practice. This has extended to the recruitment of new Academic Board and Professional Services staff governors, a new training and appraisal plan for all governors, and the appointment of a number of independent governors.

“Good governance does not end here – this is not ‘job done’,” said Margaret. “Improving governance is an ongoing activity, and our Governance and Nominations Committee will oversee this continuing work as we further develop our culture. We have done the groundwork, but we have to go on making good decisions and holding people accountable for those decisions.”

And with potential changes in the sector providing an even greater onus on universities to evidence that they are well-run and offer value for money for their students, could it be that the University finds itself ahead of the game?

“I said at the outset that I wanted us to become an exemplar for the sector, and turn this into an opportunity,” adds James. “We are on our way to doing just that.”
"There surely cannot be a better place to graduate in the country," said Becky Robins, gazing towards Plymouth Sound on another typically picturesque September scene. The 21-year-old newly-minted graduate in BSc (Hons) Ocean Science is by no means the first person to utter those words, but with every passing year there is a growing acknowledgement that graduation on the Hoe really is something quite remarkable.
That was endorsed by Matthew Barzun, the United States’ Ambassador to the UK, who attended one of the School of Marine Science and Engineering ceremonies on the Wednesday as part of his official visit to Plymouth, and took to the stage to share a story of President Barack Obama and the value of taking a moment to pause to consider your next move.

He said: “It was a joy and honour to be a part of this special day for so many Plymouth graduates. And it’s a special place to be in general, especially as an American, and as the Ambassador. To be here at Plymouth Hoe, where the Mayflower set sail from, is particularly powerful.”

For the University’s Chancellor, The Lord Jonathan Kestenbaum, Graduation 2015 was an opportunity to formally officiate at one of the ceremonies for the very first time.

Lord Kestenbaum presented degrees to Faculty of Business students on the Monday, and was present to observe a minor meteorological miracle, as the hammering rain suddenly ceased barely five minutes before the first ceremony ended and the graduates were due to line up for their official photo.

Lord Kestenbaum said: “It was a fantastic day. When I woke up on Monday morning it was pouring with rain and by the time the students arrived for their photo the sun came out. More importantly, it was a day when we saw the University at its very best: ambitious, and with a tremendous cross-section of students bursting with pride.

“And the most important thing that I learned came from the students when we lined up for the photo. They were all talking about what they were going on to do next. Not one of them was talking about ‘the end’; they all gave the sense that it was the beginning.”

The graduation furniture created by the country’s leading designer, John Makepeace, was also on show for the first time, and he was in attendance to view them in situ, along with Plymouth graduate Ben Harvey, who helped him to make them. And Fijian rugby star Josh Matavesi attracted a large crowd of well-wishers as he attended to celebrate his wife’s graduation. He later tweeted: “Happy and proud you graduated whilst pregnant & raising a 2year old whilst I’m away with Fiji for the World Cup #PlymGrad #proudfamz”.

It was a first Plymouth graduation for David Alder, Chief Marketing Officer at the University. “I have seen many graduation ceremonies in the 10-plus years that I have been in Higher Education,” he said. “And everyone told me when I came to Plymouth that I would be bowled over by our graduations, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality. I can think of few things that capture the essence of our University so well: a truly moving and uplifting experience that is both celebratory, yet has gravitas; has a big sense of occasion, yet is slightly unorthodox; and, perhaps most importantly, is hugely exhilarating and fun.”

The last word, as the first, goes to Becky, who graduated on the same day as her sister Nicola (MEng in Civil and Coastal Engineering). Her path to Plymouth was paved by her big sister, who first advised her that a love of the coast could be channelled into a relevant degree at university.

“It was the only course I wanted to do, at the only university I wanted to attend,” said Becky. “So it’s fitting that at the end of it all, we’re here by the sea again, and I can celebrate with my friends and family, knowing my degree has helped me to secure a graduate job with a major water company.”
“What we’ve been working towards is the creation of a more immersive and inclusive learning environment for our students,” says Professor Pauline Kneale, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, of the fundamental curriculum changes rolled out across the University at the start of the academic year. “It’s about helping them to adopt good study habits, and to really engage them with the University, their course, and their colleagues.”

The move to a semester system means the University will use the summer term more effectively, with assessments spread more evenly across the year, and crucially, earlier assessments as well. Then there’s the introduction of an intensive four-week module to immerse new students in their course and university life. And at the start of the second semester, those first-year students will work with contemporaries from other courses through the ‘Plymouth Plus’ module, which will use problem-based learning to work on practical, real-world issues.

As with any change of this magnitude – the first of its kind for 30 years – it has not come without its challenges, but as Debby Cotton, Professor of Higher Education Pedagogy, says, with the Teaching Excellence Framework on the horizon, it has been crucial that the University has been proactive in implementing new methods that will address not only teaching quality, but student support, satisfaction and retention.

“The enrichment programme has at its core a focus on reducing that element of confusion for undergraduates,” she says. “If you have 12 different modules all starting at once, with no assessment until June, then it’s perfectly understandable that students might struggle in those formative weeks. By intensifying the experience, it helps students see...
by constructing model gliders and boats and testing them on campus and in the Marine Building, Frank Abraham, Associate Head of School (Engineering), in the School of Marine Science and Engineering, said that while it was important to give students a preview of the equipment and facilities they would use in their degree, it was more meaningful to have them build something and reflect upon their learning.

“We wanted to create an experience that perhaps took them back to the time of their childhood – of building something physical,” said Frank. “It was then about testing and refining it to make it better – after all, we did not design the perfect engine at the first attempt! Then, in the wrap-up session, we looked at what went well and what did not go so well.

“The most important thing they can learn in this module is that they must learn for themselves.”

In the School of Nursing and Midwifery, the emphasis of the four-week Ways of Knowing immersive module is focused more upon setting the context for the degree itself, and signposting students to where they can access help and support.

“Our students come from a broad range of backgrounds,” says Janet Kelsey, Associate Professor in Health Studies (Paediatric). “This year’s cohort contains, at the one end, masters graduates and those with PhDs, and at the other, students who have come in from access courses. Many of them are accustomed to working with a tutor, so having to go to different places to source the very great support they have is a challenge for many. We wanted to provide them with some of the building blocks they will need.”

If anything, say the team, students have been left expecting more nursing. But as Anna Chick, Lecturer in Child Health Nursing, says, that in itself may be a sign that the module is working as intended.

Victoria Hurth, Associate Professor in Marketing, in the Plymouth Business School, has gone to great lengths to help students settle into the module and University life by providing her first-year cohort with a timetable that sets clear guidance and expectations as to what they should be doing, when, and for how long. Victoria has increased the number of face-to-face opportunities students have, and introduced live project work that seeks to ground them in commercial realities at the outset, including a visit this year to chosen partner, Langage Farm.

“The module takes abstract theory and makes it incredibly concrete,” says Victoria. “There are so many different marketing theories that you can learn, and they overlap and contradict each other. What the live project does is to challenge the students to make judgement calls, and they do that having met the employees whose lives might be affected by the marketing decisions they make. It brings the subject to life in a really powerful way.”

In both mechanical and marine engineering, first-year students culminated their immersive module by constructing model gliders and
“We don’t aim to teach students how to be a nurse in four weeks,” Anna says. “It’s four weeks in the context of three years, and what we’re setting up is the expectation that nurses need to engage in lifelong learning.”

It’s a theme also picked up on by Dr Andreas Walmsley, Associate Professor in Hospitality, Events and Tourism, and programme lead for the BSc (Hons) degrees in Business and Tourism, Tourism Management, and International Tourism Management. Andreas joined the University just over two years ago and immediately began to work on the pilot phase for the enrichment project, leading to the Tourism Knowledge and Fieldwork immersive module.

“When students come up to me at Open and Applicant Days and say ‘you’ve been teaching for 20 years; how do I know you’ve not been teaching the same stuff for 20 years?’ I can tell them that we wrote four new modules last year!”

Incorporating both the student and staff voice is something that Dr Suanne Gibson, course lead for the BA (Hons) Educational Studies, in the Plymouth Institute of Education, has been mindful of since she began the process of curriculum enrichment.

“It has been quite a change in the way in which we have worked as a team,” Suanne says. “But it is one that has been for the better.”

Suanne says that the team is now looking at how they might reintroduce the 40 credits’ worth of core material that had to be removed from the curriculum to accommodate the immersive and Plymouth Plus modules.

“We feel that it’s a significant loss from an academic perspective, but that process of discussion and debate is a healthy thing,” says Suanne.

“Moving from terms to semesters; from exams to more constant forms of assessment, has undoubtedly been a major piece of work,” adds Pauline. “To get meaningful change, you have to ‘perturb the system’, so we’d like to thank all of those staff who have brought enrichment to life in their courses, and to the teams in ASTI, Learning Development, Learning Support and the Library who have supported the process.

“By challenging, engaging and supporting all students in a meaningful way, we’re setting them up for success in higher education.”

Through the air and in the water

Marine and Mechanical Engineering students were challenged to create prototypes of boats or planes using high-tech design software, laser cutters, 3D printers and a range of materials during their immersive modules. Their creations were then subjected to a day of testing, with the students competing against one another and analysing the effectiveness of their designs.

Dr Frank Abraham says: “These projects teach the students important skills in a practical and fun way. They are learning theories and principles that will stick with them through their studies and careers, while using their enthusiasm to generate novel solutions to the challenge being set. By fully analysing what they are doing, they can also learn the successful elements of their projects and other areas where they might need to focus more of their efforts in future.”

The BSc (Hons) Marine and Composite Technology and BEng (Hons) Marine Technology students were challenged to design a boat that would travel a distance of 35 metres in the fastest possible time, both empty and carrying a 1kg weight. The vessels were then tested in the wave flume of the University’s Marine Building.

Meanwhile students from the BEng (Hons) and MEng (Hons) Mechanical Engineering or Mechanical Engineering with Composites, and BSc (Hons) Mechanical Design and Manufacturing courses turned their hand to aeronautical design, building monocoque gliders which were then fired from a catapult.

Dr Jasper Graham-Jones, Associate Professor (Senior Lecturer) in Marine and Mechanical Engineering, said: “The students were given a very broad brief, and responded in a number of different ways to the challenges posed to them. But they have all gained an initial vision of the techniques they will be using during their studies, including marine or aeronautical computer-aided design, laser cutting, use of adhesives, rapid prototyping and much more.”
Questioning education

The Introduction to Critical Questions in Education intensive module for the BA (Hons) Education Studies introduces four weeks of themed learning: week one covers identity, taking a psychological, philosophical and political approach to education; week two covers social justice and inclusion; week three looks at sustainability; and week four considers the issue of space.

In each, there is a timetable of full-cohort lectures (including those taken by Learning Development) with all 60 students, interspersed with small group tutorials, and at the end of the week the groups present on their learning. At the culmination of the module, students are required to submit a 2,000-word overview of their findings.

“As the title suggests, we’re really looking to encourage our students to engage with critical thinking and engage with the research behind our teaching,” says Dr Suanne Gibson (pictured, above). “And this is aligned to some of the changes we’re seeing at policy level, especially with regard to social justice.

“The module really serves as an introduction to working and thinking in the context of what is expected in an arts degree of education.”

Rewriting the marketing handbook

The BSc (Hons) in Marketing has had its first year marketing module completely rewritten by Associate Professor Victoria Hurth (pictured, left). She has re-engineered the timetable, building in more contact time, project work and employability skills focus.

For example, students are immediately thrust into working on real scenarios provided by Langage Farm, who are involved for the entire length of the module.

They must also submit drafts of project work, which not only provides them with early feedback but also a chance to exercise valuable skills such as referencing. And following a successful trial last year, the students undertake a one-day business challenge, supported by the RNLI and Babcock Marine.

“It’s about helping first-year students stretch their limits early and in a safe environment, where they are comfortable with one another,” Victoria says. “Students have said the experience really prepared them for many other employability challenges – so I really believe it is something that we should offer to first years across the institution as part of their curriculum.”

Exploring tourism

Tourism Knowledge and Fieldwork is the immersive module that applies to all three tourism degrees within the Faculty of Business, and introduces to students the ‘scope of knowledge in tourism’ at the University.

“Tourism is a fascinating area of study because it touches on so many subjects including sociology, psychology, anthropology and geography,” says Dr Andreas Walmsley (pictured). “So we want to show them how interesting and stimulating it’s going to be!”

The students receive lectures from all of the academic staff, who present their areas of research by way of introduction. They are also taken on a field trip in the third week to Brittany, France, to consider questions of destination tourism, branding and culture, and both formative and summative assessments are linked to the trip.

“We wanted to get the students’ hands dirty with an early field trip, and the feedback has been that it’s worked really well, both as an exercise in appreciating the formation of destination image but also to help the cohort bond and feel part of the School of Tourism and Hospitality,” adds Andreas.
MAP-PING THE FUTURE:
five years in the making for Marine Academy Plymouth

Academy status doesn’t solve everything but it allowed us to reinvent the school.

Nick Ward
Principal of MAP

At first glance, it might seem that the only difference is a new name and some updated uniforms. But for the students of Marine Academy Plymouth and their families, the metamorphosis of this once struggling secondary school into the UK’s first ever marine academy, earning plaudits from Ofsted inspectors along the way, has brought about a far more tangible and long-lasting change. Among these has been a shift in mindset for many of those young people attending the school, those who now feel empowered to embrace a future full of optimism.

Marine Academy Plymouth, or MAP as it is commonly known, opened as a state-funded specialist secondary school in September 2010. Previously Tamarside Community College, and occupying an inner-city location in St Budeaux where many residents experience social and economic deprivation, the school had long been saddled with a bad reputation, and students were commonly choosing to leave at 16 and go straight into a job, believing this to be their only option.

Those in charge at MAP were determined to do things differently.
The Principal

Nick Ward joined Marine Academy Plymouth when it opened in 2010, originally as the Senior Vice-Principal working alongside Principal Helen Mathieson. Nick had previously served as deputy headteacher in a rural secondary school in Cornwall, and was enthusiastic about the challenges involved in managing a city-based school – challenges he fully embraced when he became Principal in September 2013 following Helen’s retirement.

Nick said: “Raising the aspirations of our students at MAP has certainly been the biggest challenge, and giving our pupils more optimism in how they see their futures. The support of Plymouth University has truly broadened the horizons of all the students at MAP, encouraging them to see further afield.

“A prime example of that was the tone of the individual meetings I held at the end of last term with year 11 students to discuss their choices. It is the fifth year I have held these interviews, and there has been a very noticeable change in how students view their future options.

“The percentage of our students going on to university education has certainly increased, with a marked rise in numbers maintained year on year. Before MAP began, many students thought it was more important to get a job after leaving school, and didn’t see the long-term benefits of staying in education. The changes we have made, along with the involvement of the University as our lead sponsors, have transformed that outlook. The University has also significantly supported our staff development, enabling many to pursue a masters degree to secure further accreditation.

“I’m absolutely proud of what has been achieved so far, despite many changes in education and the national curriculum that have posed their own challenges. As we move forward, one of our biggest challenges remains the need to address common perceptions people in Plymouth continue to have around the education landscape in the city, and the legacy attached to the school. We’ve made real strides in that respect but we continue to work to overcome negative, and misleading, perceptions based on history, rather than what MAP offers today.

“We also have many contextual challenges as there remains social and economic deprivation in the community in which our young people and their families are living, and the ability of the family to support the student. We work together as a team with the ongoing and committed support of our key sponsors, led by Plymouth University, to tackle these issues head on.”

Three sponsors signed up: Plymouth University, Plymouth City Council and Cornwall College, with the University as lead sponsor, and the aim was to instigate a ‘no excuses’ policy for students when it came to expectations.

Much of the school premises was rebuilt, opening in 2013 with three new floors, and modern teaching and learning spaces, alongside the existing, expansive sports complex. With the addition of a pre-school and primary school, incorporated into the secondary school campus, a virtual pathway was created to take students from nursery age to the cusp of higher education. And that infrastructure development has had to be matched by a changing mindset – by teachers, pupils, parents and members of the community.

Nick Ward, Principal of MAP, said: “Academy status doesn’t solve everything but it allowed us to reinvent the school, and offered an opportunity for a fresh start. Having the University as our lead sponsor has broadened the horizons of our students enormously, and shown them possibilities they had not considered before. In a culture where young people had grown used to assuming they would leave school and get a job, because that was their only option, we have established an environment where aspirations are routinely raised and young people are encouraged to consider many more options, with a real chance to include university among them.”

With nursery, primary, secondary and sixth form, MAP has specialist school status for its focus on the marine environment, which encompasses science and engineering. There is a strong focus on employment pathways for the marine sector as a whole, and not only marine science but also for careers in engineering, tourism, medicine, catering and construction.

The school journey starts at Marine Academy Nursery, where quality
The Pupils

Dominic Jones, Josh Stoneman, Luke Obee and Caitlin Gillard (all 17) are in their final year of A levels and have lived through the transformation from Tamarside to Marine Academy.

“It was completely disorganised,” says Luke of the final year before the switch. “There was poor discipline, bullying... it was the school’s lowest point.”

An immediate tightening of discipline — “a jolt to the students” according to Dominic — and a significant turnover of staff were the two most obvious signs of change, initially. But there then followed new facilities and new opportunities.

“This Sixth Form centre didn’t exist, and while the construction work was going on we were in cramped rooms,” said Caitlin. “But it’s great to have this independence.”

The buildings are modern and the pupils care a lot more about them,” Josh adds. “There’s a lot less graffiti and vandalism, and you don’t see chewing gum stuck to the desks.”

The opening of Marine Academy Primary has, says Dominic, made the academy community an “even happier place” and provided work opportunities for them, including supervising lunch sessions and break-times. And the four have all taken part in activities as varied as helping out on residentials, meeting the US Ambassador on his September visit to the city and presenting awards to excelling pupils.

All four are applying to university, with Dominic, Luke and Caitlin wanting to come to Plymouth to study economics and finance, English and creative writing, and maths/accounting respectively.

“Five years ago, only a handful of people went to university – now everybody is driving towards it,” says Dominic.

“You used to hear people talking about going on to apprenticeships,” adds Luke. “Now we have people coming to our sixth form from other schools because they want to go to university.”
The (Research) Impact

Academics in the Plymouth Institute of Education have been conducting a longitudinal study on the progress of MAP and the challenges of raising student attainment since its inception in 2010. Dr Tanya Ovenden-Hope, who has a Visiting Research Fellow role with the University alongside being Director of Education at Cornwall College and Adjunct Professor at Cape Breton University, and Dr Rowena Passy are the researchers at the centre of the Class of 2010 project, which has also contributed to wider reports into coastal academies across the country.

“We’ve seen a greater than ten-fold increase in the number of academies since 2010,” says Rowena, Research Fellow in Post Primary Educational Development. “And with the Prime Minister promising that ‘all schools will be given the opportunity to convert to academy status’, including the forced conversion of coasting schools, there’s a clear need to understand the experiences and outcomes of those already on that journey.”

Focusing on the first Year 7 cohort – the ‘Class of 2010’ – Rowena and Tanya have been collecting information on working levels, predicted grades and actual test performance in each subject, plus records of extracurricular activities and achievements. They have conducted interviews with a stratified random sample of 15 students (out of 214) in the summer term of each school year (and will do so until 2017) to understand their subjective experience. They’ve also interviewed the Principal, covering strategic priorities, and four teachers to gauge general views on the group’s progress, and to gain in-depth insight into the teaching and learning approaches promoted within MAP.

Rowena says: “Clarity of leadership and providing support to the teachers so that they can bring about the changes needed have been crucial to the MAP story.”

The secondary school at MAP has also seen improved performance over the last five years, with two Ofsted inspections reporting positive improvements, and an overall upward trajectory in examination outcomes since 2010. The exam results for 2013 were the best ever, with 95% of students achieving five GCSEs at A*–C grades, and A level results included 100% pass rates in English literature, photography, biology, maths and Italian, and an overall pass rate of 92%.

Over the last 18 months, students and staff have also worked together to transform the appearance of public spaces at MAP, again in conjunction with the University to benefit from its expertise and resources. The University’s Brand and Campus Design Director, Tim Guy, worked with MAP students to create a giant mural for the central atrium and dining area at the school, incorporating a marine theme, and the 38-foot high, 90-foot long piece of art was created with the help and input of designers and graduates including BA (Hons) Illustration students, and staff in the Design and Print Centre.

Professor David Coslett, Interim Vice-Chancellor of Plymouth University, said: “In the last five years, MAP has become the University’s school, and a positive way for us to share our passion for marine studies, as well as helping to nurture and develop the skills of the next generation. We look forward to continuing this relationship, and continuing to raise aspirations for pupils at MAP, for many more years to come.”

“And we’ve noted a change in the attitudes of the students over the five years,” adds Tanya. “There’s a greater confidence and engagement – a move from ‘it’s boring’ to ‘you’ve got to make every moment count!’ There were, of course, students who were making good progress five years ago, and equally there remain some students who have challenging behaviour, but the combined effect of all the changes – the new buildings, the new curriculum, the promotion of good behaviour – has helped to improve performance, and crucially, their aspirations to succeed.”
ANALYSING THE Fallout OF RADIOACTIVITY IN THE SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL

The date is 26 April 1986. The world is going about its business when an explosion rips through one of the reactors at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the former Soviet Union. Instantly, thousands of lives are changed, and the continent of Europe – and beyond – is left to manage the literal and metaphorical fallout of large quantities of radioactive particles released into the atmosphere.
Almost 30 years on, the effects of the disaster are still being felt by those who existed in its shadow, and the homes and villages once lived in by the plant’s workers lie abandoned, with estimates that some areas will not be safe for human habitation for another 20,000 years.

“It is an eerie thing to see,” says PhD student Emily Vernon, who spent a week in the irradiated zone in September. “There are books and children’s toys left on the ground, but one of the most iconic images is of a funfair that was just about to open when the plant exploded. The rides and attractions have never been used, but are preserved that way. It’s a reminder – like an innocence lost.”

Emily was one of 25 PhD students invited to the field trip in southern Ukraine, all part of the RATE (Radioactivity and the Environment) collaboration, an £8.6 million, five-year research programme that covers three major consortium projects to address unresolved issues concerning environmental activity. Each is funded jointly by the Natural Environment Research Council, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, the Radioactive Waste Management Directorate, the Environment Agency and the Science and Technology Facilities Council.

“The overriding public image of Chernobyl is that everything was destroyed in 1986, but that isn’t the case,” says Emily, who completed her undergraduate studies at the University of York before undertaking a masters degree at the University of Exeter. “We were carrying around Geiger counters and, in some areas, you stepped off the roads and the radiation levels jumped, so the effect on humans is still apparent. But all around there are trees and wildlife that survive in this environment – it is far from being the barren wasteland everyone imagines.”

Emily is working alongside Professor Awadhesh Jha, from the School of Biological Sciences, as part of the TREE (Transfer – Exposure – Effects) consortium research group. This multidisciplinary project, involving eight UK and overseas institutions, is investigating the effects of ionising radiation on wild species, combining laboratory and field settings. This could prove vital in assessing the effects of planned or accidental releases of radioactivity in different ecosystems.

“The first year of my PhD focused predominantly on optimisation of techniques that will demonstrate the damage or changes radiation can potentially cause to DNA in bivalve molluscs,” Emily says. “But ahead of starting detailed experiments, the Chernobyl trip provided me with a unique opportunity to see the impact of radiation on organisms in a non-laboratory environment, because while the region is largely uninhabitable for humans, certainly for any length of time, it is home to a wide array of wildlife.”

Among those who have made an unlikely home in Chernobyl are mussels, inhabiting one of the reactor’s former cooling ponds. Tissue samples are being collected from the mussels and will be sent to Emily for analysis. Through lab and field experiments, Emily hopes to be able to demonstrate how the impact of radionuclides on the DNA is affecting the organisms, and in so doing, identify the full impacts that existing toxic waste – and any future releases of radioactivity – might have.

Emily says: “The aim is to see if the DNA of the organisms is affected (broken) and if the expression of key genes involved in DNA damage and repair and cancer induction has changed. As humans share many genes with mussels, the study will have biomedical implications for us.”

Professor Awadhesh Jha, who has been to Chernobyl twice as part of a UK government team, and who also organised an international symposium on environmental radioactivity here at the University in 2013, feels that in order to dispose of the accumulated nuclear wastes safely, and to meet the tough targets for reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases, there needs to be a renewed attempt to commission new-generation nuclear power plants in the UK and around the world.

He says: “The PhD students working under the RATE umbrella are all part of a multidisciplinary effort to build strong UK-based capability. This research environment has the potential to create a network that will have much greater longevity than the RATE project itself, and this will not only move the science and economy forward, but will also ensure that the health of humans and the environment is protected.”
"It’s a very physical way of painting," says Antony Micallef, sizing up the work-in-progress hanging on the wall of his Notting Hill studio, not to mention the almost crystalline structure that has accreted on the floor beneath. “It’s messy, for sure, because I use so much paint. But I’m really fond of these workings; I see it as bits of my history.”

The evidence of that physicality is there on the canvas, with layers of fleshy reds and pinks layered and sculpted atop blacks and whites, not to mention plastered on his jeans and jacket, and the walls around the room...it’s like standing in a scene from Dexter, only one where you discern meaning from the spatter of oil paint. There’s blood and sweat in there too, metaphorically at least.

We move next door, squeezing through a corridor stacked with canvases, to sit and discuss a career that has seen Antony develop into one of the country’s most acclaimed and exciting contemporary artists. A graduate from the University’s BA (Hons) Fine Art degree when it was still based in Exeter, Antony’s painting style has been compared to Francis Bacon, an amalgamation of influences from the old masters such as Caravaggio to more modern contemporary photographers and graphic artists. But it is painter John Virtue, a visiting academic at Plymouth during his degree, who Antony credits with having the biggest impact upon his career.

“I was really lucky to meet some great people, particularly Chris Cook and John Virtue,” he says. “John used to talk about working and painting, and that brought home to me that I needed to get a job and get on with things after university. He taught me about mark-making, the structure of the face, the bones...but most of all, he instilled discipline, and I needed that.”

During the final year of his degree, Antony trained up on a whole range of graphic communication packages and secured a job in Brighton as a designer. For three-
and-a-half years, he worked 9–5 before returning to his tiny flat where he would paint every night.

“I had a pile of rejection letters from galleries – “not what we’re looking for” – and I really wish I’d kept them now,” he says. “It got to the point where you’d be sending stuff out and maybe you’d get one reply out of every 20. But that sets you for the future, it hardens you up. If you do anything creative you have to toughen your skin.”

The big turning point came in 2000, when Antony won second prize in the BP Portrait Award competition and was shown at the National Portrait Gallery. Six hugely successful exhibitions have followed at the likes of Tate Britain and the Royal Academy, and a well-publicised list of admirers (and buyers) from the world of celebrity has lengthened with each.

Much of Antony’s work has been framed around his engagement with, and dissection of, pop culture and consumerism, but his most recent exhibition, Self, showcased something new, something inward-looking in its gaze.

“I discovered this ‘heavy’ style around October of 2014,” he says. “I call these paintings self-portraits but I’m only using myself as a vehicle in terms of where the light is falling. To me, it is about the layering and the chemistry of paint, the medium itself.

“I’ve always wanted to make work like this, but I never had the dexterity or the courage to do so. They are energetic, and you’re never quite sure what you’re going to get. Painting is about a conversation you have with the piece. Sometimes you have to make compromises because it wants to go in a certain way.”

One of his more recent pictures sits between us – A Self-Portrait on Red. The face looks as though it’s been flayed to the tendons, the textures almost daring you to reach out and touch.

“I don’t see them as that dark, but I understand why people do,” he says. “If you disfigure the face, if you smudge it…if I can capture something that is really visceral, if it has life behind it and can breathe on its own and have energy, then I’m winning in what I’m doing.”

Recognising when you’re winning and when you’re “running into a brick wall” is a major consideration for Antony. When it goes wrong, “it’s brutal” he says, a confidence-sapping, paint-draining experience that you sense leaves him with a near physical scar. Like a method actor deep in character, or a boxer shut away in a training camp, Antony admits to sometimes having to sit in silence for an hour in order to “reacclimatise”.

And that’s one of the reasons why he is taking himself off to the South Pole for a three-week holiday – not so much a blank canvas as a neutral space; away from his brushes and knives; a chance to refresh and re-energise before returning to finish his work for his next major show in Hong Kong, in May next year.

“It’s one of the biggest galleries in Asia, so it’s a great opportunity for me,” he says. “I’m really excited. I love having a show – it gives me something to work for.”
If it is done right, a lecture is a theatrical experience – you walk out in front of an audience and you have to hold their attention for much longer than under normal circumstances.

From setting fire to school classrooms to providing the pyrotechnics for the front covers of four JG Ballard novels, the work of Dr Roy Lowry has never been anything less than explosive. He has, variously, fired 1,600 ping-pong balls out of a cannon in the Roland Levinsky Building, exploded packets of Angel Delight, and set a world record for the number of fireworks released in 30 seconds (56,405 to be precise).

Little wonder the Associate Professor of Chemistry has, during the course of 25 years of teaching and inspiring outreach work, earned the affectionate title of ‘Rocket Man’.

But behind the goggles – and at a suitably removed minimum distance – is an academic fiercely committed to the principles of pedagogy and peer engagement.

“I think of my practical demonstrations as ‘coat hooks in the brain’,” Roy says. “They create the ‘wow’, which enables you to follow up with a whole number of ‘hows’. It’s a great way of changing gears when you’re asking someone to listen to you for 50 minutes. And I’m a big believer in applying everything I do to a practical level.”

It’s a belief born out of his own experiences – the good (an inspiring chemistry teacher at school) and the bad (“I did my BSc at a well-respected red brick university. It was very academic, in that it was ‘of no practical use whatsoever!’”), the latter of which turned him off science for several years. Instead, he indulged a passion for stagecraft by running his own business, Tarsus Lights and Pyrotechnics, something that, ironically, he’s ultimately ended up integrating into his pedagogical approach.

After completing a PhD, Roy took up a research role with the then British Gas, and found himself put forward as the man who presented findings on a regular basis to the chief executive. It was during these sessions that he...
began to think that he might have the makings of a teacher, and so it was in 1989 that he joined Plymouth on a lectureship post in the former Department of Environmental Science.

“For the first ten years, that first lecture of the academic year you could hear my knees knocking,” he says. “But I’ve worked hard and developed over time. If it is done right, a lecture is a theatrical experience – you walk out in front of an audience and you have to hold their attention for much longer than under normal circumstances. And it doesn’t matter what has gone on before you get there – your computer has crashed, or you’ve had a row over the breakfast table that morning – the lecture must be the most captivating topic on the planet, and you have to make it so.”

Recognition of Roy's show, ‘Pyromania’, came when he was asked by the Royal Institution to take a lecture in London, and he delivered it from the same theatre that hosts the Christmas Lectures – a series that had so entranced him as a boy. He has also recently been called upon by artist Stanley Donwood to provide the pyrotechnics for the artwork adorning four JG Ballard novels, the complete set of which were recently displayed in the Roland Levinsky Building as part of the Plymouth International Book Festival.

And then there are the private and public firework shows that Roy is invited to stage, through a private company run by a good friend.

A father of four, and now a grandfather to four (with a fifth on the way), Roy also squeezes in drumming and support for the Plymouth Christian Centre into the air pockets of his life. And nearly a quarter of a century on from first walking through the doors at the University, there’s little sign that Roy is in danger of fizzling out. “I think I have always stayed true to my core principles,” he says. “I try to teach through real-world scenarios, and I still believe that we’re on a journey together with our students.”

“My hope is that they will excite young (and not so young) minds to ask how and why such things happen and hence to delve deeper into science.”
Bridie Kent joined Plymouth University in January 2013 as a Professor of Leadership in Nursing. Two-and-a-half years later, she’s taken on the role of Head of the School of Nursing and Midwifery – and she’s well prepared for her new challenge, as CONNECT finds out.

Q Tell us a little bit about your nursing experience.

I trained at St Bartholomew’s in London back when nursing was a hospital-based training rather than an academic one, and specialised in intensive care. I only went into academia several years later, and after doing my degree in nursing, I was persuaded by a clinical academic that I should do a PhD. I went on to work in New Zealand as Director of Clinical Nursing Research at the Auckland District Health Board and Auckland University and then in Australia as Professor of Nursing at Deakin University. Family commitments have brought my husband and I back over to the UK, and now I’m here in Plymouth. Believe it or not, there are a number of parallels between nursing abroad and here in the UK, including helping to care for an ageing population, patient safety issues, and dealing with women having babies at an older age.

Q What do you hope to achieve in your new role as Head of School and what do you think are the biggest challenges you face?

I think we are very lucky at Plymouth University to be making strides in research, be inspiring in our teaching, and be exemplary in clinical practice, so I’m going to do my best to connect them all and enable everyone to get the very best out of their time here.

I think we are very lucky at Plymouth University to be making strides in research, be inspiring in our teaching, and be exemplary in clinical practice, so I’m going to do my best to connect them all and enable everyone to get the very best out of their time here. It’s definitely a challenge as Nursing and Midwifery, in terms of student numbers, is one of the biggest schools at the University, but by putting research evidence into practice we can ensure that we provide the best, most consummate care – both in nursing and midwifery and throughout the entire Faculty of Health and Human Sciences.
What makes the nursing and midwifery courses at Plymouth stand out from those at other universities?

The University is the biggest provider of nurses and midwives in the South West and we have a fantastic number of career opportunities and diverse specialisms, which are a great draw to the hundreds of people who apply here each year. I think our work in sustainability in nursing is very forward-thinking and certainly makes us stand out, as does our fantastic clinical schools project with local NHS trusts. Plymouth’s nursing and midwifery also has a real inclusivity about it, as its applicants are from a very mixed demographic. Fewer than half of the people on our course are school leavers and there tends to be more mature students, who feel that they have the opportunity to excel here, perhaps after undertaking other careers previously.

And are there any areas that you think could be improved?

We really do have some fantastic research going on at the University and we need to publicise it more. Nurses are renowned for not promoting themselves enough, so I’d like to encourage our students and academics to be more vocal about the work they’re doing. Also I think clinical schools across the peninsula are a fantastic way to combine research with real-life skills, so I’d like to look at utilising these more as we move forward.

Despite some negative coverage in the media, nursing still remains an incredibly popular career choice – why do you think this is?

Nursing has taken a real battering in the news but ultimately everyone who considers entering the profession really cares about helping others. We have all at some point seen or received the kindness and care a nurse provides, whether in a hospital or the community, and I really think that inspires people. Our recruitment is values-based so we ensure that we take on the students who would excel in the profession, are committed to it and are prepared for the hard work. It has to be said that, as well as negativity, the media has also been responsible for some good in nursing. There are a lot more men applying for the courses now, which is possibly as a result of media influence.

Tell us something about yourself that people might not know.

I’m quite proud of the fact that I was the first person to be awarded a PhD in nursing from the University of Wales, Bangor. But what people would probably be most surprised to hear is that, when I get the chance, I enjoy windsurfing (or at least trying to windsurf!). I was persuaded to have a go about 15 years ago when I was studying in Wales, and I have since gone on to achieve Royal Yachting Association (RYA) Levels one and two. I’m also a keen runner and often run as part of my commute into work.
I had nothing to lose so I put in an application for the fund, and it was amazing to be supported: without that help, there’s no way I’d have been able to make the trip.

Working in a leprosy colony and helping those who’ve been shunned even by their own countrymen is perhaps not the most obvious way to spend a summer. But for physiotherapy graduate Maria Thaller, three months of volunteering in Vietnam have shaped her future in a way she could not have imagined.

“It sounds cliché, but it truly was life-changing.” Maria says, when she looks back to 2014 and the trip that preceded her graduation. “Friends have told me that I changed in many positive ways, and it was such an enriching experience that I can’t wait to go abroad and do something similar again. And I’m enormously grateful to the University for supporting me and making the trip possible in the first place.”

Maria, now 23, enrolled at Plymouth – her hometown university – because she’d been attracted by the course and its balance of problem-based learning and mixture of lectures with practical work. During her time as a student, she was involved with many societies and clubs, and it was in her final year that she applied to the University’s Roland Levinsky Memorial Fund for a grant. Set up in 2007 in memory of the late Vice-Chancellor, Professor Roland Levinsky, the Memorial Fund supports undergraduates with awards of up to £1,500 to enable them to undertake personal development activities.

And so it was that Maria’s grant funded travel to North Vietnam to work with leprosy sufferers in a hospital in Hanoi, a rehabilitation village located just outside the city, and a remote leprosy colony in Van Mon. She explains: “I wanted very much to help people with leprosy but I thought it wouldn’t be possible, as I just couldn’t afford to travel there. I had nothing to lose so I put in an application for the fund, and it was amazing to be supported; without that help, there’s no way I’d have been able to make the trip.”

Charitable organisation Projects Abroad was able to put Maria in touch with a family, with whom she initially stayed, but many of the arrangements
she made herself, overcoming language barriers in the process. Once there, she was able to use her physiotherapy training to help those who had suffered from leprosy and had been left with gravely debilitating side effects. The condition affects the skin and nerves of sufferers and can lead to disfigurement, deformity and blindness.

“I went to a village of around 300 people recovering from leprosy, and most of them didn’t leave their rooms. They existed in shocking living conditions, left lying in a metal bed, and with a very poor quality of life,” Maria says.

“Some had no one coming to visit them, and many were amputees as a result of the leprosy, with at least one limb, if not all four, having been removed. I helped by providing physiotherapy, but in some cases what people needed was even more basic: I just carried them outside, so they could interact with others. The simple fact that I was willing to touch them was quite an emotional experience for many, as they’d been shunned by society.”

Recalling her meeting with one man, Maria adds: “I was incredibly moved to spend time with him; looking into his deep eyes, I could tell that he had seen and experienced things that I could not even imagine. They told of struggle, love, separation, a deep sadness and yet he seemed at peace, with a calm acceptance. I will never forget those eyes.”

The stigma surrounding leprosy remains prevalent in Vietnam, as Maria discovered when a bus driver refused to take her to the leprosy colony and dropped her off in the “middle of nowhere” and told her to walk the rest of the way.

After returning to the UK in time to graduate, Maria moved to Torquay and began working as a physiotherapist for the Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust.

“I love it, it’s what I’ve always wanted to do, and my degree at Plymouth prepared me well for the job,” she says.

Though Maria plans to continue working in the UK, she is keen to repeat her Vietnam experience by again volunteering in other countries where she can use her skills to support others.

“I’ve got the bug now, so I hope to make another trip soon,” she says. “Plymouth provided me with such a lot of support, and the best advice I can give to anyone else studying there is to make good use of all the support available, and latch onto opportunities as I did.”
MONACO OPENING FOR MARINE STATION

The University’s award-winning Marine Station was formally opened in October by His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco. Prince Albert, who received an Honorary Doctorate of Science from the University in 2013, flew in to meet staff, students and city leaders during an extensive tour of the £4.85 million waterfront teaching and research facility.

“I was very impressed by the building and the facilities, and everything flows in a wonderful way,” said HSH Prince Albert. “And I was very interested to speak to some of the students and the professors about the work that was being done in the laboratory. They have incredible access here to the marine environment.”

The Prince’s Foundation has funded a number of scientific research studies at the University, and he told CONNECT that the invitation had further deepened his ties to Plymouth.

“To see these dynamic new facilities can only enhance the scope and reach and prestige of the University, and I’m happy to be a small part of it. I hope to return here – I feel at home now!”

MARY WATKINS APPOINTED TO THE HOUSE OF LORDS

“Honoured and truly humbled” was the reaction of Professor Mary Watkins, formerly Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Plymouth University, to the news that she had been made a member of the House of Lords in October.

Professor Watkins – The Baroness Watkins of Tavistock – will sit on the crossbenches after the Independent House of Lords Appointments Commission confirmed the peerage in recognition of her work in nursing, education, social enterprise and housing.

Mary, Emeritus Professor of Healthcare Leadership at the University, retired as Deputy Vice-Chancellor in 2012, but still retains close links to the Plymouth University Peninsula Schools of Medicine and Dentistry, and serves on the Board of Governors. She is also closely involved with the governance of Marine Academy Plymouth, which is sponsored by the University.

She said: “The reaction to the appointment has been wonderful, and I’ve been inundated with messages of support and engagement. And I’m looking forward to the challenge – as a nurse, I have been driven by the desire to improve patient care; as an academic I aimed to instil that ethos in students; and through my work in mental health and housing I endeavour to ensure that those most in need are considered when developing strategy. I promise to go on championing the contribution of nursing, the University, and the South West in this new and exciting phase of my life.”
SHALLOW SURVEY CONFERENCE

The Ocean City – and the University – was a fitting venue for Shallow Survey 2015, the 7th International Conference on High Resolution Surveys in Shallow Water. The event, organised by the UK Hydrographic Office and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in partnership with the University, took place in the Roland Levinsky Building from 14 – 18 September.

The event attracted more than 275 professionals from across the international seabed mapping community, who came together to hear and discuss technical papers from leading experts in the field, focusing on data gathered at depths of less than 200m. All areas of the globe were represented, with delegates coming from Japan, Australia, China, Norway, Sweden, America and Canada, as well as the UK.

Preparations for the event started during the summer of 2014, when a number of hydrographic surveys were carried out in and around Plymouth Sound, using a range of methods and equipment. The resulting dataset acted as the key focus for the conference, giving delegates the opportunity to analyse and discuss the merits of the different approaches used.

As well as the conference itself, the Roland Levinsky Building welcomed a trade exhibition, where 44 companies at the cutting edge of this technology showcased their products and services, and there was a gala dinner in the Graduation Marquee on Plymouth Hoe.
UNESCO HONOUR FOR SUSTAINABILITY EXPERT

The University’s Professor of Sustainability Education, Stephen Sterling, was invited to attend the inaugural UNESCO-Japan ESD Prize Award Ceremony in Paris, in November. The ceremony, held during the 38th UNESCO General Conference, was addressed by the UNESCO Director-General and the Japanese Minister of Education and attended by some 200 delegates, including three Ministers of Education and a number of ambassadors.

Stephen is the co-chair of a five-person expert International Jury that met in the summer to consider over 80 outstanding ESD (education for sustainable development) projects submitted from all over the world for the prestigious award funded by the Japanese government. He has been asked to retain this role for the duration of the prize, for the next four years.

Stephen has worked closely with UNESCO for more than ten years with regard to its sustainability education policy and programmes, which are now being taken forward as part of the Global Action Programme (GAP) for ESD.

He said: “It is an honour to play my part in this important global initiative to catalyse and celebrate sustainability education around the world. And of course, it reflects very well on Plymouth University’s leadership in the field of sustainability in education.”

GIVING THE HIVE A NEW BUZZ

The Hive – the base for the University of Plymouth Students’ Union (UPSU) departments and Executive Officers – has received a vibrant makeover, allowing for students to meet with their representatives in a spacious new environment.

As well as housing all UPSU sports clubs, societies, volunteering and fundraising departments, The Hive now also offers students a brand new study and leisure area.

The previous set-up was popular, but could not comfortably fit in all sports and societies staff. Now, its new layout and bright decor allows all groups to have their own space.

The project was delivered efficiently too, as the UPSU Executive team approached the Project Management Office in May 2015, and refurbishment – down to the last blade of grass – was completed by the end of August.

UPSU President Ruth Titmuss said: “The Hive now says creativity! You can tell when you walk in that this is where students think, socialise and come up with their next big ideas. It’s a great environment, with the colours and grass creating an exciting and vibrant place to be.”
Around 80 second-year students had the chance to push themselves to the limit when they embarked on a two-day expedition of Dartmoor as part of a new module focused on communication and leadership.

Created by Dr Charly Braungardt and Dr Alison Stokes, the module develops a variety of skills, including writing for science and the media, as well as communicating effectively via social media.

Antony Jinman, Explorer in Residence at the University, and experienced expedition-leader Paul Hart both led the trip in October, where the students were split into groups and given a variety of leadership tasks, including coordinating a search alongside the Dartmoor Search and Rescue Team.

Charly said: “Environmental scientists really need to be able to develop arguments and communicate complex ideas if they’re going to engage the public and their peers once they start their careers. But many of today’s undergraduates arrive at university without having developed these important attributes – we’re trying to address that and also push our students to discover something about themselves.”
The recent *Cut and Paste* exhibition, in the Peninsula Arts Gallery, brought to campus the work of Ivan Chermayeff, a world-renowned graphic designer. Co-founder of New York design agency Chermayeff & Geismar, Ivan is responsible for some of the most memorable logos and branding of modern times, including the Mobil ‘O’, National Geographic and Smithsonian. The exhibition was curated by David Smart, Associate Professor in Graphic Communication, in association with De La Warr Pavilion, in Bexhill, and included a stunning set of posters for Mobil, editorial design, brand identity and some remarkable vibrant collages.