Hilary Cottam is designing the solution: a new social enterprise in the public sector/
Alan Knight tells us about his lifelong passion/Making sense of food: Martin
Yeomans takes a look at eating habits and their impact on obesity/In the
spotlight: Professor Adrian Bird FRS talks to Falmer/View from the Students’
Union and information on the first Sussex Summer BBQ.
Vice-Chancellor’s welcome

It is always a pleasure to welcome you to the latest edition of Falmer. This magazine has a vital role in communicating news about Sussex to alumni and friends around the world, and recent months have seen important changes in the University.

This autumn term saw the intake of the first cohort of students in the new regime of ‘top-up’ tuition fees. This is a significant development in higher education in the UK, and one that reinforces the importance of ensuring that Sussex continues to offer students the highest standards of teaching and learning facilities.

It is vital also that the Sussex experience remains accessible to students from all social backgrounds. We are immensely proud of the success of our outreach programmes, and especially pleased that in this year of new fees we have done particularly well in relation to our national performance benchmarks for widening participation.

The quality of the Sussex student experience is linked to the quality of the University’s research. We are now in the midst of preparations for the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, and it is encouraging to see the quality of both teaching and research at Sussex recognised by objective international comparative studies. Sussex was named among the world’s top 100 universities in a new global poll by the American magazine Newsweek, and we also scored in the top 20 places to study in the UK in three separate annual league tables.

The wonderful campus environment is very important to the success and attraction of Sussex. Those of you who have been able to visit the campus in recent months will have seen some of the effects of the investments we are making in our campus facilities. We have two major student residence schemes in progress, which, together, will give us an additional 720 en-suite student bedrooms on the campus. The Ostricher Lecture Theatre has benefited from the kind of sensitive refurbishment and restoration that a listed Spence building deserves. Other improvements to teaching space are under way.

I have announced that I will step down from the Vice-Chancellorship in August 2007, rather than in 2008 as I had long intended. The University’s strategic planning timetable means that it makes sense for me to hand over to my successor in 2007 rather than 2008.

I have been at the University of Sussex since 1981, and I have an enormous affection for, and commitment to, the institution. It has been a great privilege to be the Vice-Chancellor of this wonderful university for nine years. There have been some rocky patches and some difficult days, but I am immensely proud of what the University has achieved during that time. Personally, the Vice-Chancellorship has been all-consuming, high-profile, hugely rewarding, hugely frustrating, and much else, and leaving it will be an enormous wrench. I am grateful for the support that our alumni and friends give to the work of the University and also for the personal support I have enjoyed from you all.

With best wishes,

Alasdair Smith
Vice-Chancellor
Teaching rooms get a makeover

Teaching rooms on campus are being transformed in a rolling programme of work that started in spring 2006 and will continue through to the end of the 2007 Easter vacation. In seminar rooms, upgrading work includes redecoration, lighting, new carpets and new blinds. New technology (data projectors, whiteboards and interactive whiteboards) is being installed in a number of rooms.

By summer 2007 there will also be 11 new seminar rooms in Arundel and 16 on the second floor of Bramber House. In addition, the Chichester Lecture Theatre, designed by architect Sir Basil Spence and listed by English Heritage, has been restored to its former glory. Refurbishment has included a new roof, new seating (increasing capacity from just under 300 to 350), extra lighting and new audio-visual technology, as well as a redecorated lobby and toilets.

The upgrades and refurbishments are being funded by HECF (the Higher Education Funding Council for England).

Sussex physicists celebrate first findings of major neutrino experiment

Physicists are celebrating the first findings of a major international experiment to understand one of the mysteries of the universe. Dr Lisa Falk Harris and Philip Harris are among those taking part in the Main Injector Neutrino Oscillation Search (MINOS), designed to study ghostly sub-atomic particles called neutrinos.

Neutrinos are vital to our understanding of the universe. They are able to travel through the earth without interacting with it, and their abundance may explain how galaxies formed and why antimatter has disappeared.

The Sussex team is responsible for designing a system to measure the energy emitted as neutrinos collide with a 3,400 ton underground detector. A beam of neutrinos is being transmitted from Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory (Fermilab) in Chicago to the detector 450 miles away in Minnesota. It took the scientists 11 years to develop the detector and the beam was switched on last year.

‘Originally, neutrinos were thought to be massless, but we now know this isn’t the case,’ explains Dr Lisa Falk Harris. ‘They exhibit the most extraordinary behaviour; they are able to transform into three distinct types of flavour as they travel.’

Dr Falk-Harris says the findings will now shape the progress of further work. ‘Our results will set the scope for further studies of neutrinos for years to come, ultimately helping us to understand the formation of the universe.’

Sussex exceeds widening performance expectations

The past year has seen Sussex enjoy tremendous success in exceeding both its own and national performance benchmarks in widening participation recruitment.

Recent years have seen the University emerge from a position of under-recruiting students from lower socio-economic groups to exceed the HEFCE benchmark. Currently 22.5 per cent of our students come from lower socio-economic groups, compared to the HEFCE benchmark of 20.1 per cent.

The results are a strong endorsement of the work of the University’s Student Recruitment Services, and the success of the Sussex Education Access Scheme (SEAS), our participation in the Sussex Access Higher project, and the Sussex Liaison and Progression Accord.

Thanks to the generous support from alumni and friends to the Sussex Fund, the University has been able to offer a higher number of scholarships specifically aimed at this group of students.

Sussex is also now consistently and significantly exceeding HEFCE benchmarks for young students from state schools, who accounted for 85 per cent of the 2005/06 intake, compared to the benchmark figure of 76 per cent.

While figures for mature students have fallen from a high of almost 24 per cent in 2003/04, Sussex continues to attract a very high number of mature full-time students. The current figure of 18 per cent is well above the 10 per cent benchmark among our peer Group universities.

Likewise, Sussex enjoys a relatively high number of disabled students, who account for 6.7 per cent of the 2005/06 intake, compared with the comparable HEFCE benchmark of 3.3 per cent.

New residences begin to take shape

Construction has begun on two new student residence schemes, opposite Bramber House and at Falmer station, which, together, will provide an additional 720 en-suite student bedrooms to the University’s existing stock.

The Bramber House site will see the construction of three blocks housing up to 250 students, in flats of five or six study bedrooms, each with an en-suite bathroom. The intention is to complement the residences at a later date with a new teaching building at right angles to the Boiler House, to create a new green quadrangle at the heart of the campus.

The Falmer Site station sees the construction of three cross-shaped blocks containing 474 bedrooms, each with en-suite bathroom facilities. While the development is being built by an external private partner, the residences will nonetheless be managed by the University.

Combined, the two developments will lift the proportion of rooms at the University with en-suite facilities from 10 per cent to nearly a third of all housing stock, closer to what other universities offer. Both residences are scheduled to be ready for the autumn 2007 intake of students.

And the intention is that construction will not stop there. New student residences with up to 360 bedrooms are being considered for North Field, north of Lewes Court, by 2008; and the redevelopment of East Slope (in phases) by 2010.

Teaching rooms in Arundel Hall and 16 on the second floor of Bramber House. In addition, the Chichester Lecture Theatre, designed by architect Sir Basil Spence and listed by English Heritage, has been restored to its former glory. Refurbishment has included a new roof, new seating (increasing capacity from just under 300 to 350), extra lighting and new audio-visual technology, as well as a redecorated lobby and toilets.

The upgrades and refurbishments are being funded by HECF (the Higher Education Funding Council for England).
Biologist works with rainforest communities to save endangered monkeys

A year after launching a project to save one of the world’s rarest monkeys, the Sussex biologist coordinating the scheme has made his first sighting of the elusive species. Dr Mika Peck is working with an environmental organisation in the Ecuadorian Andes to secure the future of the brown-headed spider monkey (Ateles fusciceps) and its rainforest environment. There are only 50 known breeding pairs of the spider monkey that exist in the wild. Using methods he describes as ‘citizen science’, Mika demonstrated data collection techniques to communities surrounding the Los Cedros Biological Reserve in order to train them as para-biologists. The five-day course was designed to instil the skills necessary to monitor the spider monkey in its natural environment to help protect the species from extinction.

It was not until the final day, however, that Mika observed an actual spider monkey. ‘One of the groups came running over and said they had seen a spider monkey and when I followed them, I saw it, sunbathing in the canopy. It was a fantastic sight and a great way to finish the first training course.’

In a part of the world facing numerous conservation and environmental concerns, Mika found people were enthusiastic to learn how to preserve the rainforest region where they live. ‘The trick is to create something that the people can continue themselves.’

Southern Railway supports new scholarship scheme

Three first-year Sussex students are benefiting from a new scholarship scheme supported by Southern Railway. The new scholarships, which are granted on the basis of academic merit and financial need, will support undergraduates Shanielle Blake, Cheryl Lipscombe and Charlotte Stace throughout their studies.

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Energy firms will reject nuclear power stations, say Sussex experts

The University of Sussex Energy Group has criticised government plans for a new generation of nuclear power stations, arguing that energy firms will not invest in new plants without further government intervention. Of the new Energy Company’s electricity market over the past 15 years has encouraged firms to focus on the cheapest forms of power, leading to investment in tried and tested energy sources such as gas and wind,’ says Dr Jim Watson, Senior Fellow in the Sussex Energy Group.

‘By contrast, nuclear investment is subject to greater financial risk, in part because the reactor designs being offered are new,’

In delivering the government’s energy review, The Energy Challenge, published in the summer, Trade and Industry Secretary Alistair Darling said that it would be for the private sector to initiate, fund, construct and operate nuclear plants; and cover the cost of decommissioning and dealing with nuclear waste.

The Sussex experts point out that the huge upfront capital investment for nuclear power stations is unlikely to be forthcoming, unless investors are given price guarantees for the energy they produce.

“We are in danger of repeating history,” says Dr Alistair Scott, Fellow at the Science and Technology Policy Research Unit (SPRU). At the end of the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher ordered a new generation of ten nuclear power stations. In the end, she got just one - Sizewell B. We expect that this may be about to happen again.”

Sussex students prepare for US entrepreneurial scholarship

Two former Sussex students will see in the New Year whilst on a six-month visit to the US, as part of an entrepreneurial scholarship programme. Joshua Seal and Will Griffiths have been selected by the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship (NCEO) and the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation to be part of their new Entrepreneurship Fellows scheme.

In June they secured two of just 15 places on the scheme after presenting their business concepts, addressing ways of reducing energy use, to an interview panel in London. Joshua Seal, who graduated in the summer with a Mechanical Engineering degree in Robotics, Cybernetics and Process Automation, has developed a device that reduces power consumption for devices left on standby. His idea also earned him a runner-up place in the SEEDA-sponsored regional Make a Difference competition which encourages students to tackle issues that will affect their futures.

Will Griffiths, a Mechanical Engineering graduate, has also sought to tackle wasted energy. He is developing a wireless thermostatic radiator valve for central-heating systems, to address energy wastage from unoccupied rooms in commercial and residential buildings.

Once Joshua and Will arrive in the US in January, their six-month stay will include interaction with leading scholars and thinkers, policy leaders, innovative researchers and business founders. They will be supported in developing commercial know-how and relevant new business contacts.

At the end of the programme Joshua and Will are expected to bring what they’ve learnt back to the UK, not only as a means to bring the lessons back to us, but also to share them with other aspiring entrepreneurs and educators within Sussex and across the region.

Commenting on their success, Will said, ‘We are delighted to have been selected as Fellows. Being able to develop and pursue our business ideas in both the UK and the US will be a great opportunity and give us the guidance we need to help mature our concepts.

‘It will be fascinating to learn about entrepreneurship in a country where it’s held in such high esteem, and we look forward to bringing the lessons back to share with our fellow students across the University.’

Sussex continues to rank highly

Sussex has been named among the world’s top universities for the third year running and was ranked among the top 20 places to study in the UK according to three separate annual league tables.

A new global poll by American magazine Newsweek in September placed Sussex 14th in the UK and among the top 100 universities in the world. For the third year running Sussex has been ranked joint 12th in the UK and among the top 150 in the world by the Institute of Education at Shanghai Jiao Tong. In October also saw the University ranked 17th in the UK, 43rd in Europe and 105th in the world by the Times Higher Education Supplement.

Commenting on the latest rankings, Vice-Chancellor Professor Alasdair Smith said, ‘I am delighted that the high quality of teaching and research at Sussex continues to be recognised across the world, for the third year running, by objective, international studies. This confirms the basis of our strong international reputation, which is bolstered further by the recognition of Sussex’s achievements in a national study of British universities.”

The Newsweek study is designed to reflect how universities are working to satisfy an increasing number of international student body. The numbers of students from around the world, the programmes available and how they prepare graduates for global careers are among the criteria assessed by Newsweek’s Top 100 Global Universities. Measures used to compile the list include the number of highly cited researchers in various academic fields at each university, the percentage of international academics and international students, and the number of articles published in leading publications. Harvard University is awarded the top spot in the international poll, with the University of Cambridge placed at number six as the highest ranking British institution.

The 500 universities featured in the Jiao Tong poll were ranked according to the quality of education, the faculty and their research output. The University was awarded the same accolade in September 2005 and before that in 2004 by the Institute of Education. The 500 universities featured examined more than 1,000 institutions worldwide.
Designing the solution: a new social enterprise

Named ‘Designer of the Year’ in 2005, Hilary Cottam (MPhil Economics 1991) is the former Director of the Design Council’s RED team. A champion in the promotion of a more inspiring and efficient approach to design in the public sector, Hilary’s work has helped radically transform the design of British schools, the prison system and the health service.

What does the word ‘design’ conjure up for you? A beautiful kettle, a sleek car, or an interior from House and Garden? The designer Hilary Cottam is not involved with any of these. ‘I’m not a designer in that sense of the word. For me, design is a problem-solving process, so whether you’re looking at a car, a building or a kettle, if it’s a good design, behind it is a problem-solving process about how this object can work better; even something very simple like what is the best way to fill a kettle and heat it.’

Designing the solution: a new social enterprise

‘A knowledge-based economy needs different education skills, and trust and non-attendance are huge problems in inner cities,’ she says – a firm believer that much of this has to do with the way education is organised. ‘Working with the school’s senior managers, she and her team identified what curriculum and learning systems were needed to motivate pupils, alongside the requisite management structures and pastoral care systems. ‘We worked with teachers and staff including frontline staff like dinner ladies, pupils and the surrounding community to look at all these things, and then we considered what kind of building we could wrap around it to make it all possible.’

For instance, realising that more space was needed for a vocational curriculum than for classroom teaching, the school now has bigger assembly areas, and dedicated teaching space for subjects like home economic skills. ‘The building itself is not the whole answer, and from this experience we published what we thought the government should do at that time: making decisions about future school buildings.’

Hilary believes, however, that improvement in schools does not necessarily require physical change. ‘In the north of England, a head teacher has seen that the design process is brilliant for rethinking his school’s strategic vision and working differently with his management and senior team. More and more of our projects are about that: about a problem-solving process that people can use which is very democratic and that quickly leads to action.’

Hilary and her team have also used their collaborative design process to address problems in the prison system. Currently, it costs around £27,000 a year to keep someone in prison and most of that money is spent on security: ‘We know that 80 per cent of prisoners re-offended, that many can’t read and write, and that rehabilitation does work, but it is very expensive. We have been telling government that existing resources can deal with this problem but at the moment it’s impossible because of the constraints of the prison buildings. This is a classic example of where good design doesn’t cost more.’

‘We can workshops with prisoners and prison officers and produced a building design that cost 20 per cent of the normal prison building to construct and operate, thus releasing 80 per cent of that £27,000 to pay for courses. It is completely different thinking.’

The building is also very cleverly designed, with a much smaller footprint. Wandsworth Prison, which was our model, takes up a lot of very expensive land. Our prison design would take less than 30 per cent of that land, and the government would be free to sell the rest.’

Land use is a fundamental issue, believes Hilary. ‘If you’re trying to buy land to build new prisons – which the government is – then it will need less land. What is critical about this idea isn’t just the materials and the site; it’s that we’ve thought very carefully about how the site is used. The standard prison is radial and was designed when rehabilitation was minimal. Now prison authorities are trying to get prisoners to workshops, classes and so on. To move people around these buildings, from one wing to another, is extremely difficult and requires an expensive high staff to prisoner ratio. Our buildings are small units based on a house system. You can keep each house locked up and people can move around within it. One person can see what’s going on in all the buildings, which means that staff are freed-up to offer more prisoner support.’

More recently, Hilary has become interested in new social problems such as preventative health care. ‘However much we reform the health service, it cannot promote the necessary lifestyle changes unless people know they need to take more exercise, but find it difficult actually to do it. So our latest work in health has been looking at how we can design systems to motivate lifestyle change.’

One of the team’s most successful projects has been with Kent County Council. ‘We realised that although people don’t go to the gym, they will try things with groups of friends. So we approached a group of women who walked their dogs after dropping their children off to school. We see that they could be encouraged to do more exercise. For instance, if we were able to give them a personal trainer once a month, could they measure that they were changing their lifestyle?’ These mothers took up the offer and became the first group of ‘activmobs’, i.e. groups of people who get together regularly to do an activity. ‘There is more to it, but if we get it better and have a website (www.activmob.org) to help other groups get started, and a lot of activities are going on in Kent. This is a very simple design that works online and on paper, and Kent now wants to try it throughout the county as a social enterprise project. All we’ve designed is a system for getting people together and promoting exercise.’

The idea that design could improve the public sector first came
A lifelong passion

Alan Knight (BIOLS 1972), founder and CEO of International Animal Rescue, speaks about his lifelong interest and the work that recently won him an OBE for his services to animal welfare.

When I decided to study for a degree in Biology at the University of Sussex, my choice was greatly influenced by my passionate interest in animal welfare. After graduating in the late 70s, however, it was very hard to find a job in this field and so I took a job with a manufacturer of microscopes. This at least had a strong scientific connection. I stayed with the company for 25 years, ultimately becoming chairman of the group.

Throughout that time I became increasingly involved again with animal welfare. I travelled all over the world with the business and saw plenty of examples of animal suffering and the need for help. Eventually, in 1986, a friend and I founded International Animal Rescue.

I was chairman of the trustees when the charity had a bequest from a very dear friend. It gave us the opportunity to employ staff for the first time and I decided it was time for a life-changing career move. I applied for the job of chief executive. The position was advertised nationally so I was thrilled and relieved when I was appointed.

The charity began by setting up a clinic in India to sterilise and vaccinate the many dogs and cats living on the streets to help stabilise the stray population. This reduced the incidence of serious diseases like mange and rabies and cuts down on fighting over territories. This reduced the incidence of serious diseases like mange and rabies and cuts down on fighting over territories. This reduce[...]

Our main centre is in Goa, where we rescue bears who also treat livestock and all kinds of wildlife, including snakes, monkeys and elephants. Our experience and expertise mean we get support from the Indian government, which pays us £5 for every dog we sterilise. The technique works elsewhere too, and we have sent teams of vets with trappers to Turkey, Greece, Spain and Ireland.

Since the end of 2002 we have been concentrating much of our efforts on a project to rescue dancing bears in India, which are horrifically abused by Kalandar nomads. The Kalandar have been in India for over 200 years. Initially they took the bears from village to village and they were treated as good luck to take one or two hairs from the bears’ coat. This has now developed into an industry to beg money from tourists. The bears are dock bears, which are protected under Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and ‘dancing’ them has been illegal in India since 1972. Despite this, poachers snatch the cubs from the wild when they are only weeks old, often killing the mother bear in the process. The ‘training’ of the bear involves ripping out its teeth and claws and forcing a red hot poker up through its nose and out through the top of its snout. When the handler pulls the rope up above his head, the bear tries to avoid the agony in the wound in his nose and appears to be dancing when he’s really writhing in pain.

With our Indian partners Wildlife SOS, we have established sanctuaries in Agra in the north, near the Taj Mahal, and near Bangalore in the south. Together we have rescued and rehabilitated more than 290 bears, enabling them to live and behave like wild bears, with trees and behaviour.
Making sense of food

With the festive season over, many of us are trying to return to less indulgent eating habits. Yet, for a growing number of people, binge eating is not just confined to Christmas; it has become a way of life.

Dr Martin Yeomans, Reader in Experimental Psychology at the University of Sussex and an expert on the study of appetite and eating behaviours, explains which factors determine how much we eat and what our food preferences are.

Common sense might predict that all of the issues people living in our modern-day society may struggle with, food should not be one of them, at least in developed countries where levels of poverty are low and food is readily available. However, the most striking change in the health of western societies in many decades has been the increase in the incidence of obesity. In the US, levels have increased from around seven per cent of the population in 1985 to approaching 30 per cent by 2004, with similar increases in most western countries including the UK. This quadrupling of the obesity rate in 20 years has been accompanied by equivalent rises in incidence of obesity-related diseases, most notably diabetes, cancer and heart problems. This obesity epidemic cannot be attributed to any one factor, but has arisen through the inability of our appetite-control system to match energy intake to energy expenditure in the context of our modern, sedentary lifestyle.

Traditional homeostatic approaches to control of appetite were based on the hypothesis that the amount we eat was a product of two sets of processes. The first set related to energy usage by the body. The depletion of energy stores was thought to result in signals that stimulate areas of the brain (hunger centres), which in turn lead to the experience of hunger. As hunger increased, we sought out and consumed food. Ingestion leads to a number of processes, which in turn lead to the experience of satiety. As hunger decreases, we seek less food, and then produced signals after eating that prevented further intake (satiety). We now know a great deal about the neural basis of these two sets of processes, and the homeostatic premise has been shown to describe the basic processes of control of eating well. In some cases malfunction in one or more components of this appetite control system has been shown to underlie

Below: A comparison of the levels of obesity in the United States in 1985 and 2004, adapted from data provided by the United States Centre for Disease Control.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Obesity Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>&lt;10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>&gt;25%</td>
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Alternatively, we have a second set of processes which result in the experience of hunger. As hunger increases, we seek more food. Ingestion leads to a number of processes which stimulate areas of the brain (hunger centres), which in turn lead to the experience of hunger. Ingestion leads to a number of processes which stimulate areas of the brain (hunger centres), which in turn lead to the experience of hunger. Ingestion leads to a number of processes which stimulate areas of the brain (hunger centres), which in turn lead to the experience of hunger.
of taste, smell, appearance, hearing, touch and pain (produced by heat or irritants such as chilli). For example, most people would rate a ripe strawberry as having a sweet smell. But sweetness is a true taste, not smell, experience. So how do we experience sweetness in a smell? Collaborative research between Sussex, Sydney and Macquarie Universities has shown that consistent experience of an odour paired with a sweet taste in the mouth results in increased experience of sweetness when the odour is next encountered. This experience of one sense by stimulation of a second is called ‘synaesthesia’, with the most extreme forms occurring when people smell sounds or see colours when they hear them. This cross-modal sweetness is much more common, and probably evolved as a way of allowing us to use smell to distinguish ripe from unripe or ‘off’ food.

While understanding the complexity of flavour perception has led to insights into the nature of sensory perception, the impact on appetite depends on our simultaneous intake of many sensory experiences that are generated by food in our mouth. Modern research has moved away from isolated investigations of each sense to one of multi-sensory evaluations. Take the example of eating strawberry. We can identify the ‘taste’ of strawberry, but in doing so we make use of many senses. Visual experience allows us to expect the strawberry taste, while our true sense of taste identifies a level of sweetness or ripeness. Our sense of smell detects the smell of ripeness, but we need to manipulate the strawberry in our mouth, and the noise we detect while chewing, also allow us to evaluate ripeness: too hard and we perceive this as under-ripe, too soft and we expect the fruit as ‘going off’. But the main taste is primarily the complex odour molecules experienced Firstly as we smell the fruit (orthonasal odour) and then released in the mouth (retro nasal odour) that give the true ‘taste’ of strawberry. Many people note they lose their sense of taste when they have a cold – in practice, it is odour perception that is impaired. But the complexity of the odour of food is even more complex than the outcome of the integration of specific cases of obesity. However, such instances are rare, accounting for no more than four per cent of the obese population. While the homeostatic model of eating can explain eating in response to energy loss, it would explain food intake largely ignores the hedonic (pleasantable) component of eating. It is now recognised that the current obesity crisis is driven at least in part by our tendency to over-consume foods we enjoy, over-riding the more basic physiological hunger and satiety systems. Research at Sussex over the last 15 years has focused on understanding this hedonic component of appetite control.

In order to understand how hedonics relate to over-eating, first we need to understand how the hedonic system of the brain processes the food we eat. Flavours that produce a burning sensation in the mouth result in increased experience of sweetness when the odour is next encountered. This experience of one sense by stimulation of a second is called ‘synaesthesia’, with the most extreme forms occurring when people smell sounds or see colours when they hear them. This cross-modal sweetness is much more common, and probably evolved as a way of allowing us to use smell to distinguish ripe from unripe or ‘off’ food.

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Leading the way

Adrian Bird (Biology 1965) is Buchanan Professor of Genetics and Director of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell Biology at the University of Edinburgh. A Fellow of the Royal Society, Professor Bird is a leading figure in cell biology, and serves on the Board of Governors of the Wellcome Trust, one of the world’s largest medical research charities. His many accolades include the Louis-Jeantet Prize for Medicine and the Gabor Medal of the Royal Society.

You have been Director of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell Biology since 1999. What is the main research focus and applicability of the work of the Centre?

Our remit is to make discoveries that advance understanding of normal and abnormal cell function. We do not go about this by enunciating central research programmes from on high, but instead rely on ‘investigator-led’ research. In other words, the Centre’s scientific progress depends on the ingenuity and curiosity of its research group leaders, each of whom follows his or her own instincts. Experience suggests that curiosity-driven research of this kind will remain important for future biomedical advances. To the non-scientist, this can sound irrational. If you want to sing a song about cancer, most people would not write a song about how to treat cancer, because why work on the yeast cell cycle or Drosophila mRNA localisation? The answer is that in our present state of ignorance about how multi-molecular cellular processes actually work, it is almost impossible to predict exactly what research topics will turn out to be the most relevant. Time and again, major advances in knowledge have come without warning from curiosity-driven inquiry. What we can be sure of is that many human disorders are rooted in cellular defects, so our research is never far from biomedical relevance. Indeed, research going on here has already prompted a party advanced knowledge of several medical conditions, including retinitis pigmentosa, cancer, cardiomyopathy, muscular dystrophy, autism and Rett Syndrome.

The Wellcome Trust’s mission is to do research that is likely to benefit health, but does the work of the Centre have any applicability beyond medicine?

Our major raison d’être is to advance medicine through research, but there is always the possibility that discoveries in basic science will lead us in unexpected directions. I also hold the rather unfashionable view that knowledge is intrinsically good. By rationally addressing questions about life at the molecular level, we are part of the scientific enterprise, which in my opinion is humanity’s most noble achievement.

Your main research interest is the role of DNA methylation. Could you explain what DNA methylation is and in what way it impacts on gene research?

The human genome is marked with a pattern of chemical moieties called methyl groups. My lab’s research aims to try to understand the biological roles played by these methyl groups, which seem to be signals attached to genes. It has been clear for some time that the human genome is heavily methylated throughout most of its length, but there are short gaps of methylation-free DNA that mark most human genes. In somatic cells, notable cancers, these gaps are closed by filling in methylation and this causes the long-term silencing of the genes concerned. We and others are trying very hard to understand how the gaps are maintained and how they keep genes in cancer that causes them to be closed with such important medical consequences.

We are also interested in understanding DNA methylation patterns, once established, are read. Some years ago my laboratory came across a family of proteins that is attracted to methylated sites in the genome where they recruit large multisubunit protein machines that cause gene silencing. Here again there is a disease connection, as one of these proteins (MeCP2) is mutated in the vast majority of cases of the autism spectrum disorder, Rett Syndrome.

Is there one particular goal towards which your research is directed?

We have several goals, and some of these fluctuate with time, but a long-standing focus has been to understand the role played by MeCP2 in the brain. Rett Syndrome is a disorder that affects one in 10,000 girls and leads to delay of onset of profound mental retardation. We study a rodent model of the disorder to try to dissect and disentangle the role of MeCP2 in the brains of normal and diseased cells. This has taken us for the first time into the area of neurobiology, which is one of the most fascinating and fast-moving areas in biology.

Which do you think will be the most exciting areas of work in the field of gene and cell research in the future?

We are in the golden age of biology. The genome project has given us a methyl – CpG binding domain of methylated DNA. We are in the golden age of biology. The genome project has given us a sense that the human genome is heavily methylated throughout most of its length, but there are short gaps of methylation-free DNA that mark most human genes. These gaps are closed by filling in methylation and this causes the long-term silencing of the genes concerned. We and others are trying very hard to understand how the gaps are maintained and how they keep genes silent, and this causes the long-term silencing of the genes concerned. We and others are trying very hard to understand how the gaps are maintained and how they keep genes silent, and this causes the long-term silencing of the genes concerned. We and others are trying very hard to understand how the gaps are maintained and how they keep genes silent, and this causes the long-term silencing of the genes concerned. We and others are trying very hard to understand how the gaps are maintained and how they keep genes silent, and this causes the long-term silencing of the genes concerned.

Which do you think will be the most exciting areas of work in the field of gene and cell research in the future?

We are in the golden age of biology. The genome project has given us a list of components but told us nothing about their function in making a living organism. The next century of biomedical research will be required to fully exploit this resource. Nominating areas of future research...
The generosity of Peter de Bourcier (PhD Computer Science 1992) has enabled the University of Sussex to offer a highly competitive three-year scholarship to an outstanding overseas student pursuing a doctoral degree in Informatics. As a strong believer in the power of education in transforming young people’s lives, Peter hopes philanthropy will play an increasingly important role in helping British universities to become more self-reliant to continue providing academic excellence.

You came to Sussex in 1992 to do a PhD in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence. Why did you choose to study at Sussex? Sussex was an easy choice for me. I had lived in Brighton for the previous four years while doing a BSc in Computer Science down the road at the University of Brighton. I loved the city with all its bars and restaurants. In the final year of my degree, I started looking into artificial intelligence and robotics and one of my lecturers suggested I visit some people he knew at Sussex. At that time Sussex and Edinburgh were the top two places to study these subjects.

Did you keep in touch with the University after your degree? When I left Sussex I went straight into a post-doc at the University of Maryland, just outside Washington, D.C. While I was there, I was finishing writing up my PhD and still going to a lot of conferences. I didn’t have the time or money to get back to Sussex for a year or two, but I did keep up with some of my former classmates.

How would you describe your career path since you left Sussex? Everything became busy for me after I finished writing up my thesis. I left my post-doc and joined a computer games company. I stayed there for a couple of years. Then, as the internet started taking off, I moved to a startup called Play.com. We basically took a look at what Amazon were doing in the US and offered something similar in the UK. Over the years the sales of DVDs went through the roof. Two years ago I decided it was time to take a break and start looking for something new to do, so I sold the company. You can have too much of a good thing.

What are the main projects you are currently involved with? I have been travelling a lot and meeting lots of people. Along the way I got chatting to a movie director in LA and a British writer I know, and put together a production company that is now about to start filming a feature called Psych 9. It is a psychological thriller about a troubled nurse working the night shift in an old hospital. It’s very dark, I am very excited. It is amazing the amount of work and creativity that goes into the smallest of details.

Your very generous gift has enabled the University to create the de Bourcier CChNR DPhil Scholarship, which is currently supporting Olena Riabinina, a very talented overseas student pursuing a degree in Informatics. What was the primary motivation behind your kind donation? I think that the education I received changed my life radically. I could never have dreamed of doing what I do today, I hope that funding not just Olena’s DPhil, but many others to come over the next few decades, will really make a difference to the universities that helped put them where they are today. We would find our universities well funded and independent. Isn’t that what we want?

What role do you think philanthropy is likely to have in the future of British universities? I would like to see more people contribute to the universities or schools they attended. This system is common in other countries. You may or may not like the way your taxes are spent, but by giving money directly to a university, and even having a say in who receives that funding, you can make a difference. Imagine if 10 per cent of ex-students contributed to the universities that helped put them where they are today. We would find our universities well funded and independent. Isn’t that what we want?
View from the Students’ Union: the Sussex tradition

Life at Sussex today is extremely exciting and all thanks to our history. On the very first night of Freshers’ Week, the Development and Alumni Office and the University of Sussex Students’ Union (USSU) organised an event called 'The Sussex tradition: activism through the ages'.

Sussex activists (students and sabbatics) from every decade since the University’s birth in the 1960s were invited to inspire and educate current students on our collective potential. With attendance from past presidents and sabbatics from 1986, 1973 and 2002, the event helped make students aware of their importance and power to shape not only their own environment, but the world. Sussex’s long tradition as a vibrant intellectual haven fostering ideological debates and principled, passionate actions was illuminated.

Among the actions highlighted by past students included the campaigns against apartheid and the exploitative poll tax.

Today, the sabbaticals feel that a long period of quiet on British campuses has lulled governments here and overseas into discounting students as a potential political and social force. Apathy may have subdued many, but here at Sussex there remains a rich vein of action and activism. We are continuing Sussex’s reputation for political activity, helping to make the issues that affect students and society at large be heard, talked about and understood.

With the threat of increasing top-up fees, USSU is taking the protection of our education into our own hands. We are actively mobilising individuals to realise their worth; ask why there were 15,000 less applicants for Higher Education this year; and to question a government that fails to recognise that education is a right not a privilege.

The Education for All campaign run by USSU is aimed at helping underprivileged people get to university. USSU is seeking to fundraise through donations and events to provide bursaries to help ensure that those students most in need get through their time at Sussex. The aim is to help alleviate the burden of those worst hit by the University’s birth in the 1960s and future tours, please email alumni@sussex.ac.uk

In memoriam

The Alumni Network regrets to report the death of the following people and extends its sympathy to their family and friends.

Staff
Professor Bill Parry
Former Senior Lecturer in Mathematics
Professor Michael G Brown
Emeritus Professor in Science Studies and Education
Professor Roger Silverstone
Professor of Media Studies
Professor Roger Taylor
Emeritus Professor of Chemistry

Alumni
Malcolm Cricke
APRAS (1966)
Chappell Brown
(BOILS 1967)
Janet Street
(née Hughes)
(MAPS 1967)
Melanie Jonsson
(BOILS 1973)
Kathleen Worwell
(Researcher 1990)
Ana Maria Baranano
(Economics 1991)
Catherine Eccles
(1991)
Panagiotis Vardakas
(SMS 1994)

In response to suggestions from readers, submitted obituaries can be found online at www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni

Sussex Alumni Tours Programme launched

The Sussex Alumni Tours Programme offers Sussex alumni and friends the opportunity to visit many fascinating destinations and museums in the company of like-minded alumni. Most tours will be led, or accompanied, by an expert Sussex scholar.

The first Sussex Alumni Tour will be a visit to the Royal Academy to see the exhibition, ‘Citizens and Kings: Portraits in an age of revolution 1760-1830’, which will run from 3 Feb to 12 April. We hope that the visit will be followed by an informal dinner at the Royal Academy restaurant.

If you would like to receive an invitation to this event and future tours, please email alumni@sussex.ac.uk to express an interest to attend and to update your details, or to give details of any old friends with whom we may have lost touch.

The University of Sussex Lecture in London

This year’s highly popular University of Sussex Lecture in London will be held at One Birdcage Walk, SW1H 9JY on 14 March. The lecture will begin at 6.45pm and will be preceded by a drinks reception.

The lecture will be given by Alan Mayhew, Professorial Fellow in the Sussex European Institute and Special Advisor to the European Commission. Professor Mayhew will discuss EU policy on Eastern European accession; the political and economic impact on member states; and the future for further European enlargement.

If you would like to attend the University of Sussex Lecture, please email events@sussex.ac.uk

In response to suggestions from readers, submitted obituaries can be found online at www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni

Recent Graduates Party

Following last year’s success, we are pleased to invite all recent graduates from 2000 to 2006 to the second Recent Graduates Party on Thursday 17 May 2007 at 7.00pm.

In response to alumni requests, this year’s party will take place in Brighton, in the Terraces Bar & Grill on Madeira Drive. So bring your old photos to refresh your memory and come along to this fun and informal get-together.

We hope to see as many of you there as possible, so do get in touch with your old friends and help us spread the word. If you have lost contact details, do let us know and we can trace any long lost friends and invite them as well.

Please email us at events@sussex.ac.uk if you are interested. Invitations will be emailed to everyone, so please remember to update your contact details with us. A web page will be set up in due course so that you can check who is coming.

Events and reunions
Events and reunions

Sussex Summer BBQ

Join us on Saturday 30 June for the first Summer Barbecue on campus and help us make it the best and biggest alumni and University community event ever at Sussex.

All alumni and their families welcome.
Children’s activities and entertainment provided.
Tours of campus led by current students.
Meet some of your former tutors.
Catch up with old friends and make new ones.
Visit some of your favourite buildings.

Book now by phoning 01273 678258.
The Sussex Summer Barbecue – an event not to be missed.

Sussex people
Who is doing what and where?

60s

60s Andrew Whitley (EURO 1966) first worked for the BBC Russian Service but then started Village Bakery in Cumbria in 1976, eventually supplying organic bread to the main supermarket chains. He collaborated in a bakery venture in Moscow in the mid-1990s and won the Organic Trophy in 1998. Andrew left the Village Bakery in 2002 and has since been teaching, writing and campaigning on food and health. Andrew has four children. See page 25 for a review of Andrew’s new book.

60s Gary Kramer (SCITECH 1971) was recently presented with the Assistant Deputy Minister’s Award of Excellence for Creativity and Innovation. Gary developed a new variant of a Bottle Manikin Absorber Phantom (BOMAB). The new design features planar removable sources to both improve safety and simplify shipping. The design has now been copied by Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd for use in their in vivo monitoring facility.

60s Richard Houldmont (BIOLS 1972) has been appointed as the Director of the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) in Wales. Formerly Deputy Director of the University of Wales Press, Richard is also maintaining his publishing links and has recently joined the Board of Poetry Wales Press Ltd. Pictured with (right to left) Dave Lawson (BIOLS 1972) and A J Alexander (MOLS 1973).

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70s

70s Sir Peter Jonas (ENGAM 1973) is now a Professor at Cardiff Business School and author of the best-selling management book The Machine that Changed the World. He has established the Lean Enterprise Academy in the UK (www.leanuk.org) and a global network of Lean Institutes, applying lean thinking to industrial firms and healthcare.

70s Laurence Peters (ENGAM 1973) has co-edited a book entitled Scaling-Up Success: Lessons from Technology Based Educational Improvement. The book came out of a conference he organised jointly with Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. The book takes a look at how technology-based programmes can be effectively replicated beyond their initial locale.

70s

70s Andrew Whitley (EURO 1966) received a Chancellor’s Award in the summer graduation 2006. Many congratulations.

70s Congratulations to Julian Le Grand (SOC 1964) who received an Honorary Doctor of Letters degree in the summer 2006 Graduation ceremony.

70s After 34 years in Music and Opera at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as General Director of English National Opera in London (1984-93), and 13 years as General and Artistic Director of the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, Sir Peter Jonas (ENGAM 1965) retired in September 2006. His teaching commitments at the Universities of St Gallen and Zurich will continue and he will remain a board member of the governing body of the three Berlin opera houses and ballet company.

70s Christopher Nassaar (ENGG 1969) who was awarded a CBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List for services to higher education.

70s Tez Quirke (AFRAS 1966) and John Sargeant (CCS 1966) organised a reunion for a group of friends who started at Sussex in 1966. Some two dozen former classmates attended the event in Brighton in September 2006.

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Above Sir Peter Jonas

Above Tez Quirke and John Sargeant reunion

Above Andrew Whitley

Above Richard Houldmont with Dave Lawson and A J Alexander
80s

80s Caroline Sanders, nee Shepherd (Operational Research 1981), emigrated first to New Zealand and then to Sydney where she has now been working for 17 years. Her current role is Head of Strategic Planning, BCB IT group.

80s Andrew Vaughan (ENGAM 1981) is now based in Tennessee, where he works as a journalist, author and public relations consultant. Andrew has written several music biographies and is greatly enjoying the United States.

80s Andrew Friedman (AFRAS 1981) is living with his wife and two lovely children in a suburb of Chicago. Andrew has been working for the Clear Channel radio for six years, currently in the role of Vice-President, and is having a great time.

80s Since completing his undergraduate degree in Art History at Sussex, Gregory Minissale (SPRU 1981) has completed a PhD at the University of London and has recently published his first book, Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550-1750 (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006). Gregory has lectured and published widely and is now an independent scholar.

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90s Massimo Toschi (EURO 1992) has moved to Haiti to work for the UN Peace Keeping Mission there. Massimo is responsible for the Child Protection Unit.

90s After graduating from Sussex, James Dawson (BIOLS 1992) went on to study medicine and now works as an Anaesthetist in Birmingham. His second published book, The Oxford Handbook for the Foundation Programme, offers junior doctors a tailored and authoritative insight into the new style of working, and also numerous pearls of wisdom from four medically qualified doctors long in the tooth and well versed in the common pitfalls encountered in hospital.

90s Nigel Williams (EAM 1993) is currently the Director of Staffing for Universal Orlando Resort in Florida.

90s He has worked for the Walt Disney Company at Universal Orlando and completed a Masters degree in Human Resources at Rollins College, Florida in 2006. Nigel is also a freelance writer and enjoys long distance running and competing in marathons in his spare time.

90s Nigel Williams (EAM 1993) is currently the Director of Staffing for Universal Orlando Resort in Florida.

90s Ruth Jones (AFRS 1994) lives in London and works for the London Borough of Camden as a Management Development Consultant. Ruth says that despite not saying a word during her three years in seminars, she now loves facilitating groups of 12 to 200 managers.

90s Kara Ryder-Moy (CCS 1995) and Dominic Moy (SOC 1996) who met at the University and both worked at the Students’ Union for two years were married on 10 June, 2006. Over 25 Sussex graduates and five members of the Union staff attended the wedding.

90s Since graduation Matthew Bulba (COGS 1995) has been working on environmental projects and is a founding member of the award-winning not for profit organisation Bloomming. Futures (www.futuresветure.com). Their work is highlighting a genuine sustainable automotive fuel option, Pure Plant Oil (PPO), which unlike other biofuels does not need heavy chemical processing and does not lead to the mass destruction of rainforest habitat.

90s Ken Banks (AFRS 1996) has been offered a Fellowship at Stanford University through the Reuters Digital Vision Programme. He will be working with a number of individuals, providing technical support to projects looking to apply ICTs in sociotechnical ways in developing countries.
‘I went to Sussex to study a subject I loved, to grow up and to enjoy life in what was a wonderful physical environment. Aside from the buildings and fabulous position in Falmer, it had the freest atmosphere of any university I have visited since, and that spirit seems to persist to this day.’

Stephen Bunting, Managing Director, Abingworth Management Ltd

www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni