



Falmer

The University of Sussex magazine

Nº 60

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Welcome



Since I became Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Sussex in the summer of 2022, I have been hugely impressed by the passion, energy and creativity of our extended community of staff, students and alumni, both here on campus in Falmer and right around the globe. In particular, I have been bowled over by the stories that I have heard about the transformative impact that their Sussex experience has had on the lives of current and former students – stories of encountering new ways of thinking, of meeting people from very different backgrounds and forming friendships and building networks that together make possible previously unimagined futures.

This year's *Falmer* magazine again highlights some of the world-changing contributions being made to public life, to knowledge and understanding, and to communities around the world by Sussex alumni, students and staff.

Interviews with remarkable alumni include Turner Prize-winning artist Helen Cammock, humanitarian affairs expert Martin Griffiths, climate educator Temilade Salami and US diplomat Bill Russo.

Performing arts pioneers Topher Campbell and Jordi M. Carter also share their insights into the value of building a mentoring relationship by taking part in our Global Mentoring Scheme.

During the past year, I have been talking about how we want Sussex to be recognised as a university making a vital contribution to tackling the most pressing threats to humanity and to our natural environment. This is a critical concern for all of us, and I am extremely pleased that our efforts in this area – from creating a forest food garden on campus, to supporting a wide range of planet-protecting research projects – are already gaining accolades.

In the prestigious QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2024, we were placed eighth in the UK, 13th in Europe, and joint 26th in the world out of nearly 1400 universities. In addition, we were ranked 16th globally for our work on equality.

And once again, for the eighth consecutive year, Sussex has been ranked first in the world for Development Studies (QS World University Rankings 2024) – testament to our established excellence in research and education in equitable and sustainable development, and to the strength and vitality of our partnership with the Institute of Development Studies here at Falmer, and with our collaborators across the globe.

I am also delighted that Sussex has been awarded Silver in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) – one of the most important measures of quality for UK universities. This means the student experience and student outcomes at Sussex are recognised to be typically very high quality.

In this issue of *Falmer*, brilliant academics from our new Centres of Excellence share their research on a wide range of topics – from exploring the science of consciousness, to listening to the health of our ecosystems, to helping children navigate wellbeing in a digital context.

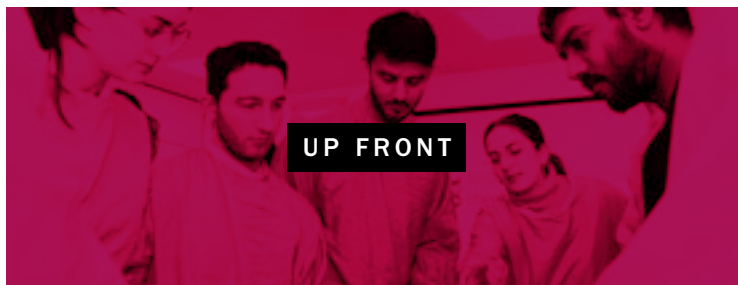
Sussex experts also present their opinions on topical challenges – such as how to draw the distinction between artificial and emotional intelligence, and whether we are making enough progress on the path to net zero.

Finally, we celebrate 20 years of the Brighton & Sussex Medical School, and the fantastic experience of being the education partner with Towner Eastbourne for the 2023 Turner Prize.

Sussex's successes are enhanced, and sometimes only made possible, through the generous support of our community of alumni, friends, staff and students. We value this support enormously and, on behalf of all of us at Sussex, I want to say a very big thank you.

With my warmest wishes,

Professor Sasha Roseneil
President and Vice-Chancellor



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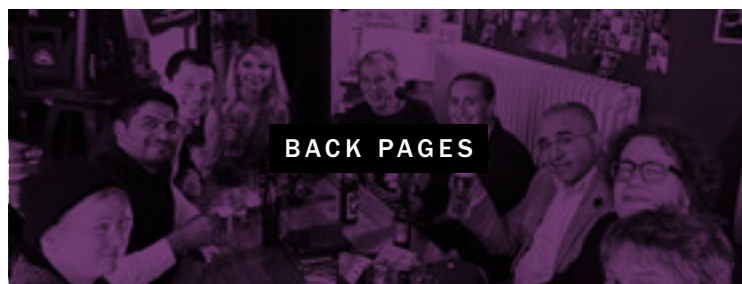
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Three AI prompts to explore the power of legacy gifts at Sussex

How do gifts left in wills play a role in University of Sussex's mission for a better university for a better world?

Delivered

How easy is it to support the University of Sussex by including a gift in my will?

Delivered

Can I support future generations at the University of Sussex through a gift in my will?

Delivered



AI typing

Verify your responses and find out how you can help shape future education and innovation:

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Legacy Manager and
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or

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News in brief

University of Sussex Business School climbs the ranks in both QS and Shanghai rankings for 2024

The Business School announced in October 2023 it has jumped from 151-200 to 30th place in the Shanghai Global Rankings of Academic Subjects for Business Administration, which places Sussex at 10th in the UK. For Economics, Sussex has retained its global position of 51-75, and is now joint sixth in the UK. In the QS Global MBA rankings, the Business School rose to among the top 151-200 in the world, top 50th in Europe, and 15th in the UK.

Sussex to set aside 42% of campus land to nature

In response to an extensive consultation involving students, staff and the wider community on dedicating more of its campus to nature, the University has decided it will increase the land set aside for nature to 42% by 2027. This figure sees the University far outstrip the UK government’s commitment to manage 30% of UK land for nature by 2030.

University of Sussex to offer degree apprenticeships for local employers

As part of the Sussex & Surrey Institute of Technology (IoT), the University is offering degree apprenticeships for employers from September 2024, helping to address skills gaps in the region. They include Level 7 Masters degree programmes in Advanced Manufacturing Engineering and Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, as well as a Level 6 undergraduate degree apprenticeship in Business Analytics and Digital Technology.

Sussex joins Eastern Arc consortium

The University of Sussex has joined the universities of East Anglia, Essex and Kent to become the fourth member of the Eastern Arc (Eastern Academic Research Consortium). The four universities have signed a memorandum of understanding that will support joint working in research, education, innovation, knowledge exchange, training and equipment sharing.



SUSTAINABILITY

Sussex maintains momentum in world sustainability rankings

The University of Sussex has been ranked eighth in the UK for sustainable institutions and 26th in the world for overall sustainability performance in the second edition of the QS World University Rankings: Sustainability 2024.

The rankings feature 1,397 institutions globally and are measured by assessing the different ways in which universities are taking action to tackle the world’s greatest Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues. This is based on three different categories: Environmental Impact, Social Impact and a newly added Governance category.

The University was ranked 13th overall in Europe and performed particularly well for Environmental Impact, ranking joint 19th globally, acknowledging Sussex’s strategy and operations towards an environmentally sustainable future.

In addition, Sussex has joined the International Universities Climate Alliance, working with the world’s most esteemed universities to publicise research, improve collaboration and help global leaders tackle climate change.

TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

Centres of Excellence launched to tackle research which is ‘impossible until it’s done’

At a parliamentary reception in the House of Commons, hosted by Caroline Lucas MP, the University of Sussex launched 12 new Centres of Excellence to accelerate progress in areas of existing research strengths. Each of the flagship centres focuses on areas of international importance and will enable researchers to address a range of societal challenges.

The Centres build on existing research strengths at Sussex,

including advancing quantum computing and artificial intelligence, better understanding genome damaging diseases, developing initiatives that contribute to global sustainability, and enhancing access to education across the globe.

The Centres will also support interdisciplinary research collaboration and provide an environment and culture where researchers can truly believe a challenge is only impossible until it’s done.

Research from the Centres of Excellence features in this issue of *Falmer*, where Professors Anil Seth and Alice Eldridge, and Dr Liam Berriman, explain the thrust and global impact of their groundbreaking work. Professor Julie Weeds also gives her opinion on the latest developments in AI.

Read more about the Centres of Excellence at www.sussex.ac.uk/research/impossible-until-done



TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Sussex awarded Silver in 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework

Sussex has been awarded Silver in the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), an official rating by the Office for Students (OfS) of the quality of universities’ teaching and education, in particular the student experience and students’ outcomes.

TEF assessments are based on data and expert panel assessment. A Silver rating means that, at the University of Sussex, the student experience and student outcomes are typically very high quality.

As one of the main aims of the TEF is to help applicants make informed choices, a Silver rating is a great accolade for Sussex’s entire community, who work together to create an innovative and stimulating educational experience for the University’s students.

Sussex recognises those outstanding in their field

Six ceremonies were held at the Brighton Centre in January 2024, with 4,369 guests in attendance from 39 countries, to celebrate the University of Sussex’s winter graduates, including those from Brighton and Sussex Medical School.

The University’s Chancellor, TV actor Sanjeev Bhaskar OBE, was present to confer the degrees on 2,154 graduates. BBC presenter and doctor Chris van Tulleken (pictured right), and economist and journalist Paul Johnson CBE – two highly-respected names who carry links to the region or the University itself – were also awarded honorary degrees.

The winter ceremonies followed the summer graduation ceremonies, which saw over 3,500 finalists from over 126 countries celebrate the end of their studies.

A further six honorary degrees were awarded to inspirational people during the summer ceremonies, including Baroness Valerie Amos, the first Black woman to lead a university; Dr Gail Lewis (IDS 1979), a leading Black feminist academic, activist and psychotherapist; award-winning interdisciplinary artist, Dr Katrina Palmer (Philosophy and Literature 1986); Paul Barber OBE, deputy chairman of Brighton & Hove Albion; engineer Richard Atkins, who advanced race car engines (and taught at Sussex); and Lord Peter Hain (Politics and International Relations 1973), former apartheid activist and Cabinet Minister.



Student constructs virtual Sussex campus in Minecraft

Fourth year Computer Science student Tom Harwood has painstakingly built and recreated the entire University campus on the virtual platform, Minecraft.

Minecraft is a community game which allows users to create their own worlds, or replicas of existing places, using building blocks.

The University of Sussex Minecraft Society has recreated and constructed campus buildings, from Falmer House to the recently developed East Slope.

Tom pulled data from satellite imagery on Google Maps, and a total of 19 million blocks were used to create the campus, which is scaled to the size of the real Sussex campus.

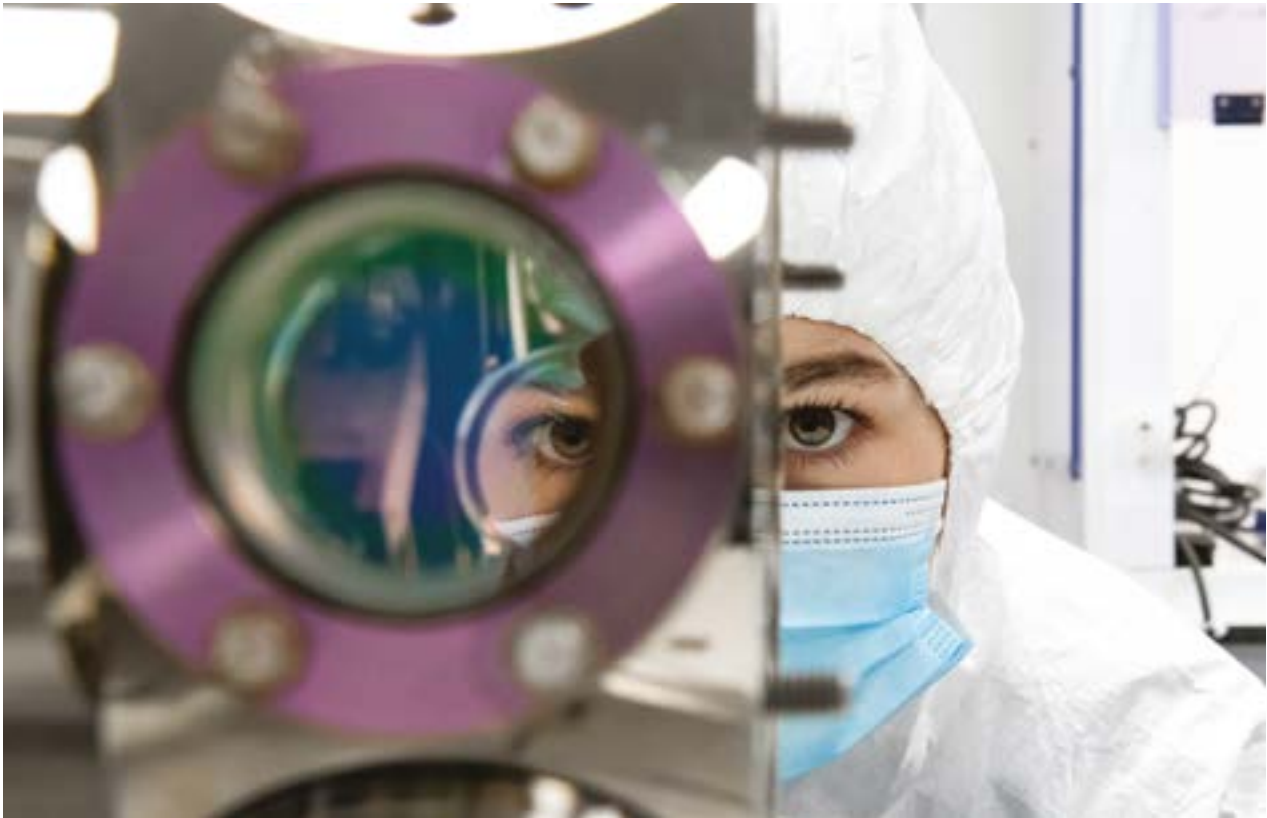
Now with a team of 20 Sussex students behind him who have requested to work on different interiors of the building, Tom sees this as an ongoing collaborative effort from students, staff, alumni and the wider Sussex community: “It would be great to see more people get involved and make every part of campus recognisable to those who have studied or visited the University.”

First-of-its-kind quantum technology degree launched by University of Sussex

In November 2023, Sussex launched a new quantum technology degree. It’s the first course in the UK to offer undergraduate students quantum technology research experience from day one of their degree.

A shortage in UK quantum graduate skills, identified by the emerging British quantum technology industry sector, was a motivating factor behind the development of this innovative degree programme.

A 2021 report from CBI Economics, commissioned by the Institute of Physics, found that 85% of quantum innovators in the UK reported that Research and Development activity had been suspended or delayed because of skills shortages. A further 37% reported skills shortages as being a significant barrier to innovation. The report highlighted that quantum innovators were also most likely to struggle to recruit people with specialist physics-related knowledge.



Art for all

How Sussex's trailblazing impact on art and education came to the fore in its role as Education Partner for Turner Prize 2023.

WORDS BY BECKY FRENCH

Over the past year, Sussex has defined what it means to be the Education Partner for Turner Prize 2023, one of the world's most prestigious awards in contemporary art. In collaboration with host and curator Towner Eastbourne – the South Coast's biggest gallery – new ways have been found to open the prize to everyone in the region. "We brought the prize to life in a way that's never been done before," says Professor Ben Burbridge, Head of Art History.

Ben Burbridge has played a key role in the partnership, which is underpinned by Sussex's strong existing relationship with Towner Eastbourne, collaborating to deliver the University's Art History Museum Curating MA and Doctoral Partnerships. "It's amazing that we have two Turner Prize-winning alumni despite the fact we don't have an art department," he says.

Helen Cammock, mixed-media artist and Sussex sociology graduate, was a joint winner of Turner Prize 2019; and conceptual artist Jeremy Deller – who holds an MA in British Art History and Critical Theory – won in 2004.

When Towner Eastbourne became the Turner Prize 2023 host, it was the first time the prize had travelled to Sussex. It marked the gallery's centenary year, and formed part of its Towner 100 programme and Eastbourne ALIVE project.

"Turner Prize 2023 brought significant attention to Towner Eastbourne, with record numbers of visitors travelling locally, nationally and internationally to engage with the work of the four artists and our ambitious arts programme, Eastbourne ALIVE," says Joe Hill, CEO and Director of Towner Eastbourne. "Working with University of Sussex allowed us to develop an initiative for Year 9s in Eastbourne, who were allowed unique access to the gallery and the exhibition, and which proved invaluable for their arts education."

Every Monday, Towner Eastbourne closed its doors to the public to make way for school visitors. Over 3,500 Year 9 pupils from Eastbourne were invited to attend a series of private tours led by student volunteers from the School of Media, Arts and Humanities.

"These young visitors found it easier to interact and relate with me because I'm a student too," says volunteer Emily Pryke, who studies Art History and Museum Curating. "During the visits, I showed my group around the entire exhibition. I asked them what they liked and if there was anything they didn't. They could be honest with me, which opened more doors for discussion."

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”

A separate pilot project, led by the Widening Participation team at Sussex, aimed to break down barriers associated with masculinity that can prevent some young men from engaging with education. Through a series of workshops, young men aged 13-14 from schools with low rates of progression into higher education used creative techniques to express their sense of belonging.

The workshops were designed to give them a voice and inspire confidence in their abilities, helping them to think about their future selves and to be open to the possibility of pursuing higher education. In March 2024, a film documenting the young men's experiences was screened alongside an exhibition of their creative work. Insights from the pilot will shape plans to roll the project out to other schools.



LEFT: Barbara Walker's Turner Prize installation at Towner Eastbourne.
ABOVE: Year 9 pupils from Eastbourne Academy view Turner Prize winner Jesse Darling's installation at Towner Eastbourne.

On campus, Sussex explored the history and curation of the annual Turner Prize, named after English painter J. M. W. Turner. A series of public behind-the-scenes events were hosted in collaboration with Towner Eastbourne at Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts. To further the reach and improve accessibility, each event was filmed, live-captioned and BSL-interpreted for people to experience either in-person or online. Sussex academics were joined in conversation by special guests including Helen Cammock, whose new University-commissioned text-based artwork – which features on a wall of the Sussex Student Centre – was unveiled during her visit. As the University's first new permanent piece of public art in decades, it signals the reinvigoration of artwork on campus.

Other Turner Prize 2023 events included a private viewing thanking alumni and supporters, the award ceremony itself naming Jesse Darling as the winner, and a reflection on the prize's impact on the local economy and communities.

"When Turner Prize arrived in Sussex, we focused on maximising opportunities to benefit our local community, as we believe that art, just like universities themselves, should be for all," says Professor Robin Banerjee, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global and Civic Engagement. "Our work with Towner Eastbourne supports the region's arts and education post-pandemic recovery, providing young people across Sussex with new avenues to explore art and higher education. In our role of Education Partner, everything we planned had to be sustainable, replicable or scalable, building a solid platform for the future. It doesn't end here."

Turn to p17 to read more about Helen Cammock and her journey from social worker to Turner Prize-winning artist.

Many healthy returns

Since welcoming its first cohort in September 2003, Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS) has graduated more than 2,000 doctors to work in the NHS and beyond. Alongside 20 postgraduate courses, groundbreaking new programmes and transformative research, the school is in good health two decades on.

WORDS BY JULIE WILTON



Innovative teaching

BSMS has developed and rolled out two groundbreaking programmes to help develop future doctors' skills and empathy in working with patient groups who may face difficulties in accessing healthcare. The Time for Dementia (TfD) programme pairs second-year students with families affected by the condition, who they visit regularly over two years.

Harriet Kwartemaa is in her fourth year at BSMS. "Time for Dementia was an amazing two years," she says. "I had the chance to interact with both the individual and their family, which boosted my confidence in working with people with dementia. Throughout medical school we learn about the science behind the disease, but TfD provides first-hand experience – especially for those who have had little interaction with individuals with dementia and their caregivers."



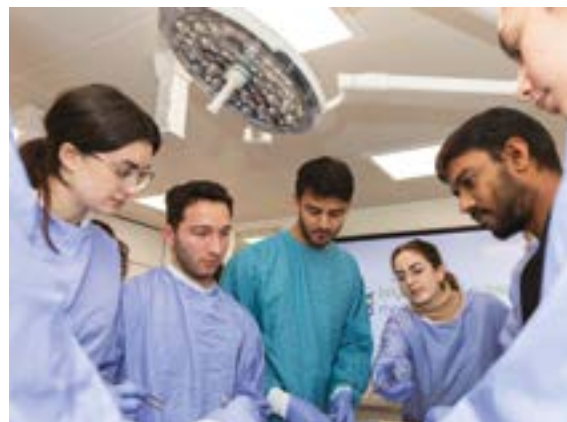
ABOVE: BSMS student Harriet Kwartemaa.

Since its inception 10 years ago, the TfD programme has been implemented in other higher education institutions across the South of England, with around 8,000 students and 2,100 families taking part. On the back of its success, Time for Autism launched in 2021, pairing students with families who have an autistic family member.



The early days

Professor Jonathan Cohen, founding Dean of BSMS, remembers the pressure before it opened. "We had about 15 months before the first students turned up – and everything to do," he says. "We had to plan the curriculum, build the buildings, recruit the staff and choose the colours for the academic gowns. It was an incredibly exciting time."



Dr Sophie Harrison (Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery 2003), who formed part of the first cohort, is today a GP and author. "When I began in 2003, BSMS was brand new. The window glass sparkled, the lecture theatre smelt like the inside of a new car and there wasn't a single chewing gum splat on the stone steps," she recalls. "These were primitive times. Smart phones weren't very smart, the Internet wasn't the default and we still carried textbooks around."

"While studying in my bedsit on Ship Street, I somehow lost track of the descending limb of the loop of Henle, distracted by the seagulls on a nearby rooftop. My class graduated on a hot day in 2008. I still couldn't tell you much about the loop of Henle, but I did learn a million unexpected things. BSMS showed me that much of what we need to know is not found in books."



Transformative research

Research at BSMS has flourished over the past 20 years, receiving national and international recognition in multiple areas of research, including neuroscience, paediatrics and haematological cancers, global health and infection.

Professor Mahmood Bhutta leads research at BSMS that looks at making healthcare more sustainable in terms of both its environmental impact and labour rights in global supply chains. "We need to understand what the barriers are to re-using medical products, including the current economic model and a lack of evidence around infection control, meaning that people will dispose of items rather than consider reusing them, for fear of infection risk," he says. "There are also issues with the supply chain for medical products, including the production of gloves using forced labour in Malaysia and PPE production in China. In northern Pakistan, I've even seen children as young as seven working on grinding machines to make products for the NHS."

"If we move to an economy where just about everything is reused, we will reduce our environmental impact in many different ways," he adds. "We're also likely to save the NHS millions of pounds each year. I hope we embed a culture where the medical goods that we buy must protect worker rights."



I had the chance to interact with both the individual and their family, which boosted my confidence in working with people with dementia.



The next decade

Professor Malcolm Reed, who has been the school's Dean for the past decade, believes there are great things ahead. "BSMS is now an established school with clearly recognised strengths in several research areas where we make significant contributions to knowledge and practice," he says. "These will consolidate and grow in the coming years, enhancing our reputation in discovery science and increasing participation for patients and public in important clinical research studies."

"The new NHS Long Term Workforce Plan sets an incredibly ambitious objective to double the number of medical student places in the UK," he adds. "The appointment of a new Dean to lead BSMS into the next decade will be an exciting time, and I am sure they will enjoy the opportunity to help shape this wonderful medical school as much as I have done over the past 10 years!"

Global ambition

Since its founding, Sussex has had a global outlook and strong commitment to the internationalisation of education. Today, we're taking forward our values-based global engagement strategy to create 'A Better University for a Better World'.

WORDS BY RACHAEL MILLER



Leading by example

Our vision is to make a real difference to people's lives in every region in which we have partnerships and to offer our students an international experience and perspective.

To support our ambitious plans, we have appointed our first-ever Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Global and Civic Engagement, Professor Robin Banerjee (Social Psychology 1992). Previously Head of the School of Psychology at Sussex, Robin Banerjee took up his post in September 2023.

As Vice-Chancellor Professor Sasha Roseneil explains, the decision to bring together leadership of civic and global engagement "recognises the entanglement of the local and the global in the contemporary world, as Sussex has done recently in becoming a 'University of Sanctuary' and as we have done throughout our history in offering support to students and academics from countries experiencing war and conflict."

"This new appointment," she adds, "will ensure that we take forward, with energy and enthusiasm, our work with our extensive network of international partners, furthering our existing collaborations, developing our transnational education offer and ensuring that we continue to attract international students to study here."

Commenting on our strategy, Robin says: "It will always take the form of a two-way relationship of learning: on the one hand, sharing the amazing education and research that takes place every day at Sussex with partners in the local area and around the world who can benefit from it; and on the other, learning from the diverse talents, experiences, cultural expertise and knowledge of our partners."

During her own first year in post, Sasha Roseneil demonstrated her personal commitment to our internationalisation agenda through a series of engagements with global partners and alumni. Early in 2023, she took part in a panel discussion at the annual International Business Horizon conference, organised by our partners at Amity University in Delhi, India. She then visited partner institution Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in May and took part in an event for Mexican alumni. Going on to attend a Board meeting of the Friends of the University of Sussex in the USA, Sasha also hosted a reception for US alumni at the Poster Museum in New York.



ABOVE: Professors Robin Banerjee and Sasha Roseneil with guests at the Vice-Chancellor's Reception in Johannesburg.

“Our innovative ‘internationalisation at home’ approach seeks to create a globally engaged and culturally diverse environment for all students, whether they study abroad or not.”

Travelling to South Africa to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of our pioneering Mandela Scholarships, Sasha and a team of Sussex staff explored the possibility of future research and capacity-building partnerships with the country.

"Sussex's historic relationship with South Africa – through the many brilliant and courageous students who have studied here over the decades – provides abundant evidence of the contribution of universities, and of Sussex in particular, to positive social and economic change," she says. "The importance of foregrounding our commitment to global engagement through equitable partnerships, and to supporting and growing our diverse international community of students, staff and alumni is clearer to me than ever after this visit."



ABOVE: Some of the first cohort of Sussex students at the UNAM Summer School in Taxco, Mexico.

Creating global citizens

Sussex has a longstanding tradition of pioneering student mobility initiatives, and we were delighted to be recognised as the best-performing university in the UK, and eighth in the world, for supporting student mobility by the World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI) 2023: Student Mobility and Openness

More than one in five (21%) of our students currently participates in an international experience, but our ambition doesn't stop there. Our target is to see 40% of our students doing so by 2025 – whether this is via our well-established study-abroad programme, summer schools, or by bringing international opportunities to our students via cultural immersion initiatives taking place on our own campus.

It's all part of our innovative 'internationalisation at home' approach that seeks to create a globally engaged and culturally diverse environment for all students, whether they study abroad or not. The goal is to ensure that all our students will be globally competent, confident, knowledgeable and skilled.

In 2022, Sussex and the Institute of Development Studies signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), establishing a student exchange agreement, a summer programme and opportunities for collaborative online international learning (COIL).

Liberal Arts student Gina Lloyd was among the first cohort of Sussex students to attend a summer school at UNAM. "Everyone who worked at CEPE [UNAM's international teaching centre] was so lovely and welcoming," she says. "We learnt so much every day about Mexican culture, each other and ourselves."

In turn, we were delighted to welcome UNAM students to our International Junior Research Programme. In early 2023, the Global Engagement team at Sussex also facilitated a six-week COIL programme in business strategy simulation that formed part of the International Business Strategy Module at Sussex. It brought together 80 UNAM and 176 Sussex students, all of whom gained global perspectives on international business concepts, developing their professional skills and strategic decision making.

We have also worked with our partner Zhejiang Gongshang University in China on reciprocal opportunities for our respective student bodies. The partnership has seen around 1,000 students studying Sussex courses in China, while over 100 Sussex students were also able to take part in an engaging 10-day online Chinese language and culture course, 'Picturesque and Dynamic Zhejiang'. The course blended basic Chinese-language instruction with the opportunity to learn about Chinese culture.

Sussex students also took part in the University of Ghana's innovative summer programmes in 2022 and 2023, which was made possible with funding from the Turing Scheme and the Sussex-Ghana Strategic Fund. Students studied a range of topics related to public health, gender and development, the transatlantic slave trade, performing arts and Ghanaian language and culture. Back on campus, Sussex students enjoyed the annual One World Week programme of events, which celebrates the diversity of cultures in our community.

8th

in the world
World University Rankings
for Innovation
(WURI) 2023: Student Mobility
and Openness

1st

in the world
for Development Studies for
the eighth year in a row
QS World University Rankings
by Subject 2024



150

Home to students from
more than 150 countries

300

Over 300
partnerships
worldwide

By students, for students

A student's achievements are more than their academic successes, but how do we capture and celebrate accomplishments outside of the lecture theatre?

WORDS BY HARRIET DE BENE

Created by students for students, the Spirit of Sussex Award (SOSA) initiative was launched in 2020 to celebrate the wider university experience. By entering for the award, students can earn points for their voluntary, extra-curricular and co-curricular activities. They can start collecting points from the start of their degree and have the entire length of their course in which to complete the award. Each time a student completes an activity, they log their points via the SOSA platform.

There are many activities students can take part in to earn points, such as being an ambassador, undertaking training, and taking part in sports and recreational activities, as well as volunteering and fundraising. The awards are 25 points for bronze, 50 for silver and 75 for gold. On average, 70% of students taking part receive a gold award.

"Logging my points with the Spirit of Sussex Award allowed me to realise how much I have done and achieved so far in my academic progress," says Bruno Pellegrino De Queiroz (International Relations and Development 2022). "It makes me feel happy and proud of myself. Sometimes it's easy to forget how far we've come and grown, so I'm glad for SOSA to remind me of all the activities I've participated in outside of my course."

SOSA can also help students to get more involved in life at Sussex, helping them to make friends and build a wider network while they are with the University. Participating in activities outside of the classroom can help students to find their community and feel more connected to Sussex. There are regular events, workshops and opportunities to network and meet guest speakers, as well as an annual ceremony and celebration event for award winners.

The annual celebration is held in the summer to congratulate and welcome final year students who took part in SOSA into the Award community. Guest speakers who either studied at Sussex or have a connection to the University are invited, and in 2023 inspiring alumna Corinne Furman spoke at the event. Corinne graduated in 2020 with a BA in Drama: Theatre and Performance, and has since appeared in films, including the *Fisherman's Friends* sequel. There is also the opportunity to meet, network and share experiences with speakers and other award winners at the celebration.

Faye Tucknott, Student Engagement Manager for SOSA, says she wants the award to be something that students can reflect and build upon as part of their Sussex legacy: "Whether they were a committee member of a society, cooked food for One World Week or presented a business idea for the Pitch for the Planet competition, we hope students can look back on their time at Sussex and know that, by participating, organising or leading events and activities, they left their mark in some way."

LEFT: Oliver Pentz (BSMS 2020) with his SOSA Exceptional Leader award.
BELOW: Somto Asibelua (Law with International Relations 2018) speaking at the 2023 SOSA Awards ceremony.



To date, almost 3,000 students have taken part in the Spirit of Sussex Award programme and the numbers are growing year on year. Many have gone on to take on part-time roles and internships, learn new hobbies and skills, complete certified training courses and join societies, serving as committee members and, in the case of Oliver Pentz (BSMS 2020), a society president.

"The thing I loved most about my work with societies is the opportunity to work with so many talented, brilliant people," says Oliver. "It was a real privilege to develop friendships and be inspired by the committees I worked with. For me, the Spirit of Sussex Award is a lovely opportunity to reflect on the relationships and celebrate the successes of my time as a society president."





To be programmed with intelligence is one thing. To possess emotional intelligence is another. Professor Julie Weeds draws a distinction between artificial intelligence and what it is to be human.

In 1950, Alan Turing proposed the imitation game, now known as the Turing Test, in which a machine is deemed intelligent if a human judge cannot reliably distinguish between human and machine-generated responses to a set of questions. Today, many would say that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT have passed the Turing Test, and that human-level intelligence has been achieved.

However, Turing did not equate intelligence with consciousness or thinking. He said that ‘thinking’ was too difficult to define, and that it was irrelevant whether the machine was thinking or not if humans could not distinguish between the responses. We therefore need to re-examine the difference between human intelligence and a machine that has been trained to be very good at manipulating language.

Large language models such as ChatGPT are first trained on vast amounts of text data, though they do not read it or make sense of it in the way that you or I do. Given the sentence ‘the sweet scent of _____ filled the air’, the model learns probabilistically to predict which words could fill the gap. Based on training data, the model might make a plausible choice such as ‘lavender’ or ‘napalm’. But it has no concept of what is true, rather than just plausible.

It certainly doesn’t have any experience or sense of smell. Reinforcement learning is then used to increase the probability of the AI-generated responses being factually correct, inoffensive and more acceptable to humans. In short, if the model produces responses that humans like, it is rewarded. If it produces the opposite, it is penalised.

So, if we ask ChatGPT to imagine it’s a middle-aged white woman and to recount a childhood memory, it might tell us about eating fish and chips on Brighton Pier. Despite how many plausible details are included, the account is not grounded in reality. You and I can imagine eating fish and chips on Brighton Pier, even if we have never done it, but how can a machine with no experience in the world beyond language imagine anything?

Does this even matter? AI provides incredibly useful tools for finding patterns in data, assisting humans in decision-making, summarising and translating documents, and creating works of art and fiction. But we must be careful when outsourcing human decision-making and reasoning processes to AI more generally. However large the training set, however carefully only ‘correct’ data is curated, and however much context is given, the current generation of AI tools cannot understand what the words mean to humans as there is no real-world experience.



Professor in Artificial Intelligence Julie Weeds (Natural Language Processing 2000) is Co-director of both the Data Intensive Science Centre and Sussex AI, an interdisciplinary research group and Centre of Excellence.

The art

Turner Prize-winner Helen Cammock (Sociology BA Hons, 1989) reflects on her profound and complex relationship with words and her path to artistic self-discovery.

WORDS BY JACQUI BEALING

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“
I began to understand
the transformative power
of art and realised it was
something I needed to
be a part of.
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In 2019, Helen Cammock became a joint winner of the prestigious Turner Prize after all four nominees made a plea to the judges to jointly receive the award in the interest of “commonality, multiplicity and solidarity”.

Subverting the rules meant the £40,000 prize money was split equally between the artists – and almost everyone was happy. “We aggravated many people, but received so many messages from artists saying, ‘finally someone has said we don’t have to compete like athletes’,” she says.

For Helen, the exposure opened conversations and led to prestigious commissions, including The London Tube Map cover and text posters across London Underground stations where travellers at the end of Covid times were invited to *sit alongside and feel me breathe*. “It wasn’t about sharing a virus, but thinking about empathy and care,” she says.

As a ‘visual poet’, Helen juxtaposes words and images through photographs, film, print and drawings. She is interested in narratives around Blackness, oppression, poverty and vulnerability, with her works often involving marginal voices.

Helen earned her Turner Prize nomination with a film about the role of women in Northern Ireland’s Civil Rights Movement. In 2022, she was invited by Serpentine Galleries to work with Pause (a London-based charity for women who have had children removed from their care) to explore ideas of resistance and resilience and how they manifest in the body and voice. The work became *Radio Ballads*, which included a performance of a song composed by Helen.



A year later, she was commissioned by Sussex to produce a piece for campus. The words *whisper tones vibrate foundations* now adorn an external curved wall of the Student Centre. “I was contemplating this project for a long time – the importance of ideas, thinking and learning – and the freedom that should be enabled with all of those things,” she says. “I value this idea of foundation in a university. New ideas will always whisper in those foundations, but they will also need the contribution of earlier thinking to learn and develop.”

She is fascinated by the power of words and how their meanings can be “engaged with differently” depending on how they are presented and by whom. “It has taken me a long time to understand what I am trying to do,” she says. “I think it started because, although I am good at spelling and have no problem writing, I have always found it difficult to take in information when I’m reading.” Growing up, Helen relied on her sister – a prolific reader – to retell stories and texts in ways that Helen could absorb. “I’ve spent a lot of time reading through my sister’s eyes.”

Helen didn’t discover her creative side until her 30s. Even though her Jamaican father was an art teacher, it wasn’t a subject that appealed to her at school. “I was good at sport. It felt like a space in which I could be myself. Art didn’t do that,” she says. “I remember doing a ceramics class and the teacher put me on the ‘remedial’ table because I didn’t want to make a cup with a round handle.”

As a teenager “who always had to fight for a cause and everything was a debate”, Sussex seemed a natural choice. She was drawn to its “radical histories” and “gentle energy”.

“It’s something about the space, the buildings and light, and that it’s out of town,” she says. “All of those things attracted me. I had just started a relationship with my first girlfriend, and I felt that in Brighton I was coming to a space that was safe.”

After university, she became a council playworker, then a social worker in Brighton – often working with families and children. One project involved those who had experienced, and perpetrated, domestic violence. “I learned that nothing was ever as clear as it seemed and that humans respond to structural and emotional abuse in myriad ways.”

Ten years later, with funding cuts causing more children to go into social care and families to struggle, she left her job. “I didn’t want to be “part of a system that claims it’s a support system yet actually isn’t.”

She began a BA in photography at the University of Brighton alongside running a multiagency support service for young people. In her second year, she landed a prestigious internship with *Photoworks* journal, and on graduating took over the co-running of Brighton Photo Fringe’s festival and activities. The year she exhibited her own work, she was invited to apply for a Masters at the Royal College of Art.

“I wondered if being an artist was a bit self-indulgent and selfish,” she says, “but the landscape of art is continually changing. Public art institutions and artists have become more interested in art that’s attempting to change the way we see, think, feel and hear. I began to understand the transformative power of art and realised it was something I needed to be a part of.”

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At present, Helen lives in Wales and, with the support of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, has found the headspace to consider new projects. These include a film about love and care – and the lack of it – which is planned to be made with her partner, film producer Laura Shacham.

“We have different heritages and there is something interesting for me in trying to twine together diverse, and perhaps conflicting, stories,” she says. “It is our story, but one that is also widely shared. It shapes who we are and how we have come to be.”



The fight for peace

For nearly 50 years, Martin Griffiths (AFRAS 1968) has worked on the frontline of humanitarian aid and mediated with leaders of the most-feared armed groups, from the Basque separatist organisation ETA to the Afghan Taliban. Now, as the United Nation's Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, his experience and skill are stretched to the limit.

WORDS BY JACQUI BEALING

"It is an incredible privilege to do this," says Martin Griffiths, speaking from his office in Geneva where he is based at the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). "Sometimes, you can do things that alleviate suffering. But it's also an impossible job."

The costs of humanitarian aid keep rising: \$56 billion this year, up from \$46 billion last year, is what's needed to support more than 350 million people in 36 different countries, with many affected by war and conflict. For Martin, war has been "a constant reality". He has witnessed the carnage of the Killing Fields of Cambodia, atrocities in apartheid South Africa, and brutalities in Gaza.

What has compelled him, as a civilian, to be in what most people regard as terrifying places and scenarios? "Dealing with terrorist organisations isn't frightening because I'm not the enemy," he rationalises. "They don't feel threatened by me. In that sense, it's not dangerous."

"The contrary answer, which is not often spoken about, is that I quite like the adrenaline of being in the middle of a shooting zone. It took me a long time to realise how wrong that was as a feeling."

Born in Sri Lanka in 1951, Martin's personal mission to bring about peace stemmed from his early experience of the Indo-China war which raged around him. Later, at his Quaker boarding school in England, he organised a "ludicrous" anti-war protest in Reading. At Sussex, where he arrived in 1968 to study in the school of African and Asian Studies (AFRAS), he protested outside the army recruitment centre in Brighton.

Although he had been attracted to Sussex because it was "radical, progressive and interested in the world", and because, as part of his degree, he was able to study Hinduism and Buddhism and understand more about the continent of his birth, he remembers his pacifism didn't fit with the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Students' Union at the time.

"I was with the right-wingers, sort of," he jokes. "But I'm grateful that Sussex took hold of me and made me challenge things, including the Left. I was forced to think quite a lot about other parts of the world."

He began his humanitarian experience with children's charity UNICEF, and was originally offered a posting in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) in the heart of the Indo-China war before it turned out to be too dangerous and was cancelled. He was instead sent to Laos – a more remote region of the conflict – where he worked in rural education, building schools "until the militia arrived overnight."

Martin left soon after, returning to London where he trained as a barrister. Following a stint as a lawyer in Oregon in the United States, he soon realised he was bored "and not a very good lawyer." He decided to reapproach UNICEF who offered him the role of assistant administrative goods supply officer in Sri Lanka: "The land of my birth. I was delighted!"

He spent five years in the posting, during which time Sri Lanka entered a war. "I was sent to the Thai-Cambodian border in 1975, right at the beginning of the Killing Fields operation, which was a fantastic opportunity to learn," he says.

Martin's long career – which encompasses being the UN's special envoy to Yemen, six years with the Foreign Office, senior positions with Save the Children and Action Aid, and helping to launch the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue in Geneva in 1999 – has given him unparalleled experience in conflict mediation and resolution. He is interested in the psychology of terrorists – their character, motives and emotions – and how hardship can move people from one position to another.

"It's understanding the otherness of their worlds," he says. "When you're labelled a terrorist and you think you are a freedom fighter, you live in a separate universe. You can't take out a bank account. You can't buy a car, so you steal one."

As a humanitarian, while he has never lost his sense of outrage at seeing children dying in field hospitals, he says it's important for mediators to not take political sides. "You deal with people who have done terrible things and who will probably do more, but it's not a mediator's job to hold them to account. This can present a moral dilemma for some."

Martin is also shocked that armed conflict seems to be the first choice when disputes flare up. "Seeing the other person's point of view isn't popular anymore. And since the two big-beast conflicts of Ukraine and then Gaza, we are losing our sense of moral purpose."

More frightening still is that, while wars are costly, climate disasters are bringing about more child displacement and will "make a mockery" of closing the funding gap. Now in his 70s, he has plans to reform how the UN's aid is organised and delivered, giving more agency to those in need. His priority remains seeking peaceful resolution.

"I have tried to imbue in people and colleagues the values of distance and of kindness to people who are not acting either way," he says. "It's the business of empathy and listening, but it's doing so with a certain amount of dispassion so that it doesn't become about you."

“

Seeing the other person's point of view isn't popular anymore. We are losing our sense of moral purpose.

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ABOVE: Martin Griffiths meets with community leaders and displaced people in Djibo, Burkina Faso, October 2022.

Sussex alumni all over the world have been active in starting new projects, making an impact at local, national and international level, achieving career milestones and gaining recognition.

Here is a snapshot of their news.

Awards

JENNIFER UCHENDU (DEVELOPMENT STUDIES 2019) won the British Council's national Study UK Alumni Award (Nigeria) in the Science and Sustainability category. Recently named one of the 2023 BBC 100 Women, she set up SustVibes and The Eco-anxiety Africa Project (TEAP), two NGOs that help to promote sustainable business practices and raise awareness of the link between climate change and mental health.

PROFESSOR ANIL SETH (INFORMATICS 1995) has been awarded the Royal Society's Michael Faraday Prize and Lecture 2023 for his ability to inspire and communicate concepts and advances in cognitive neuroscience and consciousness to the public.

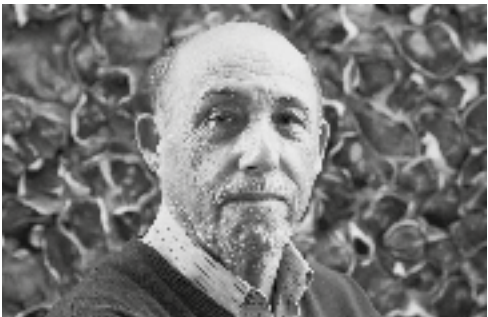


ANUOLUWAPO ADELAkun (JOURNALISM AND DOCUMENTARY PRACTICE 2017) won the Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding Investigative Reporting from the Society of Environmental Journalists for episode one – *Osun (Water for Gold)* – in her documentary series, *The Water Manifesto*. She has also been nominated for the 2024 Africa Magic Viewers Choice Awards in the best documentary category.

UK honours

In the King's 2023 Birthday Honours and 2024 New Year Honours lists, at least 12 members of the University of Sussex community were honoured by His Majesty King Charles III.

Labour MP for Exeter, **BEN BRADSHAW (GERMAN 1978)**, was Knighted for his political and public service.



University of Sussex **PROFESSOR IVOR GABER (LABOUR STUDIES 1970)** received an OBE for his services to media freedom around the world.

Author **IAN MCEWAN (ENGLISH LITERATURE 1967)** who has six times been nominated for the Booker Prize – winning it in 1998 for his novel *Amsterdam* – has been made a Companion of Honour for services to literature.

SHONA ELIZABETH RIACH (INTERNATIONAL ECONOMICS 2002), UK Executive Director to the International Monetary Fund, was made a Companion of the Order of the Bath for public service.

BIDESH SARKAR (MATHEMATICS 1987), Chief Financial Officer for the Department of Business and Trade, was awarded a CBE for public service.

DR ED GARRATT (HISTORY 1995) was awarded an OBE for services to the Integrated Care System.

CHLOE MAWSON (APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY 1996), a Clerk Assistant in the House of Lords, was awarded an OBE for services to Parliament and for her role in the state funeral of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

DR REX STRONG (PHYSICS 1974) was awarded an OBE for services to the civil nuclear industry.

SUSANNAH SCHOFIELD (HISTORY OF ART 1984) was awarded an MBE for services to Journalism and to diversity in the broadcasting industry.

PROFESSOR RACHID HOURIZI (FRENCH AND GERMAN 1985), Director of the Institute of Coding at the University of Bath, was awarded an MBE for services to the digital sector.

JANET ZMROCZEK (RUSSIAN 1979) is the former Head of European, Americas and Oceania Collections at the British Library and has been made an MBE for services to literature and heritage.



Founder and CEO of global youth charity Ditch the Label, **LIAM HACKETT (BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT 2009)** became an MBE in the 2024 New Year Honours for services to young people.

Community heroes



DR LEONOR CUTILEIRO CORREIA (MEDIA AND CULTURAL STUDIES 2017) coordinated the UBI Acolhe project providing housing for Syrian refugee families in student dormitories on the University of Beira (UBI) interior campus in Covilhã, Portugal. The scheme was born out of a non-academic paper Leonor wrote for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) while completing her doctoral thesis at Sussex.

The following alumni are national finalists for the Social Action Award at the British Council's 2023 Study UK Alumni Awards, in recognition of the impact they've made on their communities, industries and countries.

For Bangladesh – **TANJILA MAZUMDER DRISHTI (GLOBALISATION, BUSINESS AND DEVELOPMENT 2017)**, a women's rights advocate currently serving as Regional Lead Asia at Building Resources Across Communities (BRAC) International, is recognised for her commitment to equality while developing large-scale interventions.

For Kazakhstan – **DR AIGERIM MUSSABALINOVA (LAW 2016)** has advocated for enhanced support services to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, resulting in a halving of the number of children in care in Kazakhstan.

For Nigeria – **SARAH EGBO (GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT 2018)** as Policy Lead at Gender Mobile Initiative – an NGO working towards eliminating sexual and gender-based violence within Nigerian higher education settings – has engaged with over 101 Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and more than 50,000 members of campus communities.

Milestones

PROFESSOR SONYA GRIER (SOCIAL SCIENCES AND CULTURAL STUDIES 1985) has been appointed Eminent Scholar Chair in Marketing – one of three new endowed chairs at American University's Kogod School of Business. Sonya is one of the foremost experts on race in the marketplace.

PROFESSOR SANGOOK PARK (SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY 2005) from Seoul National University's College of Natural Sciences has been appointed as the first Science and Technology Advisor to the President of Korea.

GILES ADAMS (HISTORY OF ART 1985) was appointed as a Board Member of the British Library for a four-year term in October 2023. Having recently retired as a Partner at KPMG UK, Giles has been a Trustee of Historic Buildings & Places since 2018.

PANKAJ BARUA (DEVELOPMENT STUDIES 2021) is currently posted as Additional Deputy Commissioner for the People's Republic of Bangladesh, based in Cumilla.

HELEN RIMMER (PSYCHOLOGY OF KINDNESS AND WELLBEING AT WORK 2022) was awarded the first Small Business Sunday of 2024 by Theo Paphitis for her company The Kind Brave Leader. Helen provides workshops and insights that help to transform the workplace into a kinder, better environment.



JAMES EVANS (THEATRE STUDIES AND FILM STUDIES 2013) manages UK growth for award-winning US co-parenting app OurFamilyWizard, which helps families to have a better experience during divorce proceedings and following separation. He works with fellow Sussex alumni **KATIE DEANS (LAW WITH BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT 2018)** and **KATY MALONE (LAW 2016)** and, in the Australian office, **NAOMI IVES (LAW 2013)**.

New ventures



JOHN LOCKE (SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY 1984) is back on the big screen this year in a new biopic *Vindication Swim* about Mercedes Gleitze, the first British woman to swim the English Channel in 1927 and her subsequent fight for her legacy. John portrays her coach in the film, which was released in the UK and Ireland on International Women's Day 2024.

THEO MALONEY (MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT WITH PSYCHOLOGY 2017) founded JAR – Just Add Rum – a tropical mixer for making quick and easy rum punch. He suggests, “just add the rum of your choice, ice and enjoy!”

SZYMON MIKOLAJCZYK (ECOLOGY AND CONSERVATION 2004) has dedicated the past 15 years to working in climate change (at Climate Focus) and recently helped establish Football for Forests (F4F) – a non-profit using the power of football to raise funding for tropical forest restoration. The initiative was launched in the summer of 2023 with the FIFA Women's World Cup as the inaugural tournament. Around 56 football-pitch sized areas of forest have so far been replanted in the Colombian Amazon – the goal is to reach 10,000 in the next few years.

YAREN STEVEN SAHILLI (ART HISTORY AND MUSEUM CURATING 2018) recently launched art consultancy studio Artelmina, whose services range from renovation and restoration to sourcing art for workplaces, residences and community spaces.

See more Alumni News, and share your stories, at www.sussex.ac.uk/falmer

Championing change

In 2017, climate educator and activist Temilade Salami (Environment, Development and Policy 2021) founded EcoChampions, a Nigerian NGO focused on environmental education and leadership. It provided the catalyst for her journey to Sussex, in turn influencing her objectives with EcoChampions. Here, Temilade reflects on the work of her NGO and her hopes for the future.

WORDS BY ROBERT YATES

You founded EcoChampions in 2017. What was the motivator?

I was studying for a BSc in Marine Biology at the University of Lagos, which borders the popular Lagos Lagoon. Lagos is a waterlogged state, and we used to collect water samples to test for turbidity, etc. On one field trip, I saw a neighbouring coastal community and it was just so dirty. I remember asking my lecturer if that was normal, and he explained the community's water levels weren't going down due to the drainage being blocked by plastic waste and stuff. It made me feel very uncomfortable. I'm the kind of person who likes to take initiative if I see something wrong. I want to fix it. So, I told my classmates, "We need to do something, let's clean up a community." That first weekend, over 100 young people took part in a clean-up. It was amazing! After that, we began environmental awareness within the community, so that we didn't have to keep returning. That was my epiphany. I knew environmental education was what I wanted to do in life.

I'm the kind of person who likes to take initiative if I see something wrong. I want to fix it.

You then gained a Chevening Scholarship to study at Sussex?

I wanted to increase my professional development and go for my Masters. My then partner, now husband, Gideon Seun Olanrewaju, urged me to go to Sussex. He graduated from Sussex with an MA in International Education and Development in 2018. My course was really good and has helped me with my career. I got to talk about real-life issues that Nigeria was facing. It wasn't just theory, we had round tables where we assumed the roles of the village chief and the policymaker, and we negotiated. There were lots of role-play simulations. Now that I'm in the field, I can see the connection: environmental issues are also development issues. I found Sussex to be very student focused, paying attention to what also happens outside of the classroom, which really helped. I just love the community in Sussex.

And how has your time at Sussex helped with EcoChampions?

EcoChampions runs two programmes: the Climate Education Leaders Fellowship and Teach for the Planet, which is a school programme in Nigeria. The typical thing you see with climate education in Nigeria is they gather students on the assembly ground and speak about climate change for 10 minutes, and then they're onto the next school. Our approach differs in that we adopt a school for a while, so we focus less on the numbers and more on the impact and intensity. At Sussex, I realised that impact was more important than numbers. When we started the programme I couldn't find any resources, so I wrote my own books. We now have two books that we use to teach in the schools.

When we started the programme I couldn't find any resources, so I wrote my own books.

The Climate Education Fellowship came from my attending COP26 in Glasgow. I saw a lot of passionate young Africans who were climate-change actors but there was a huge gap in knowledge. They were so passionate, but they weren't in the rooms where the decisions and negotiations were taking place. I decided to create a fellowship where we could incubate young Africans focused on Africa, and train young people on every issue of climate change with a focus on how to tell your story. So many stories that come out of Africa are about victims, yet these young people were doing amazing stuff in their own communities. At Sussex I won a COP Climate Leader Prize of £3,000 for my idea, which I used to fund the Fellowship. On the launch day, we received around 1,500 applicants and we recruited 70 young people from 26 African countries. I recently met one of the Fellows at COP28 from Zimbabwe. She told me that she was inspired by me writing my book, and that the Fellowship helped her achieve so many things.

What are your hopes for the future?

I'd like to be making policies. I'm doing the best I can with EcoChampions, but that's only a fraction compared to having a seat with influence. I'm hopeful because my generation is active. We have climate activists who are protesting. Yet at the core of it, we are building a community where everybody loves each other. Everybody wants to help one another. That gives me a lot of hope.

A global perspective



Starting as a White House intern in 2011, Bill Russo (Environment, Development and Policy 2009) has worked for the US government in foreign affairs, national security and diplomacy. He played a key role in the successful Biden-Harris presidential campaign and now, as Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Global Public Affairs, he leads a team of 350 to promote American foreign policy. Here, he reflects on his current role and the journey towards it.

WORDS BY SALLY ATKINSON

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At a time where trust
in institutions is on the
decline, credibility is
our greatest currency.
”

The job is both straightforward and difficult. The reality is that the information space is changing rapidly, and each day it seems to accelerate. Whether it's dealing with changes in the media landscape, providing factual information on current events, sharing the American policy perspective or telling broader stories about American values and culture, there's never a dull day.

In 2024, a year of global elections, one of the things I'm focused on is how we shore up the information space. How do we help other governments, researchers and civil society to have the necessary tools to help understand what is true and what is not? In 2016 and 2020, we talked about disinformation. Now, we're talking about deep fakes and generative AI. In the future, there'll be more advanced technology that creates even bigger problems for people to understand what is basic fact.

The 2020 presidential race was unlike anything else. It was exciting to be part of the ebb and flow of the electoral campaign. On election night, I'd gone without sleep for close to 48 hours. I clearly recall being on my laptop, having the TV on and being in the middle of a phone call when the first calls were made that President Biden had won. I remember the tremendous sense of relief that we had gotten to a point where there was a unified sense of what had happened, that we had indeed won, and relief that I could start to move on to the next chapter.

My North Star has always been some form of service. At the University of Delaware, I initially wanted to be a psychiatrist. Psychology didn't work out for me, but by studying political science, history and English, I realised what I wanted to do was combine my interest in the environment with something more global and development focused. That led me to Sussex's environment, development and policy programme. It's a perfect intersection of my academic interests and this North Star pull to serve globally through international development.



ABOVE: Bill Russo (left) with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

I tell students it's great to have a 10-year plan – but life is going to intervene at some point. At Sussex, I had a vision of finishing my thesis and then either working for an NGO in the UK or going abroad for fieldwork. However, a week after I went home in the summer term, my father passed away aged 52. Suddenly my new objective was helping my family. This also gave me, even at 23, a realisation that I don't know how much time I'm going to have, so I don't want to waste it doing something that's not going to have an impact on the world.

Sussex reinforced the importance of a global perspective. It was one of the first times in my life where I was the only American in a room full of people. Whether it was through the global studies coursework, the diversity of my class – of nationality, ethnicity, ideology and experience – or living with five international students in Brighton, I was exposed to such a rich global culture that it stuck with me. Now, finding ways to connect with people and do so across cultural and linguistic barriers is part of my everyday life.

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At Sussex I was exposed
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”

Risk is often seen as something to avoid. Really, it's something to mitigate. The world is rapidly changing. Those who can be nimble and flexible – and those who are willing to take smart risks – are the ones who have the highest ceiling for achievement in our work today. Right now, we collectively deal with two key challenges: being credible and being compelling. At a time where trust in institutions is on the decline, credibility is our greatest currency. But we can't take it for granted. And that means meeting people where they are and having a certain level of humility.

My academic career trained me to handle and distil large volumes of input, and to make it compelling. When I go from talking about disinformation at a NATO summit, then to other side of the world to talk about the 40th anniversary of US-Brunei relations, or speaking about the Israel-Hamas conflict, climate or ecotourism, being at the top of my game requires an ability to process all the input for these totally different contexts, countries and issue sets.

I try to be the best father and husband that I can, and having a wonderful spouse lightens the load. I think it's important for colleagues that I demonstrate the value of that work-life balance. I also know that, to an extent, this is a sprint and not a marathon for me. These jobs don't last forever.

Who do you think you are?

Solving the mystery of consciousness could go beyond understanding our sense of 'self' to having broader implications across medicine, society and technology for us all.

WORDS BY PROFESSOR ANIL SETH

The nature of consciousness is truly one of science's greatest remaining mysteries. We are, each of us, made of physical matter – the same quarks and atoms that make up tables and chairs. And yet somehow, emerging out of all this stuff, we experience the world around us and experience being a 'self' within this world. How does this happen? What are the implications of a scientific understanding of consciousness for medicine, society and technology – and for each of us, individually?

In the 1600s, the scientific thinker René Descartes divided the universe into 'mind stuff' and 'matter stuff', raising the conundrum of how the two might ever interact. More recently, the Australian philosopher David Chalmers distinguished between the 'easy' and 'hard' problems of consciousness. The easy problems are how the brain and body function as complicated biological objects. The hard problem, echoing Descartes, is how and why physical processing should give rise to conscious experience at all. Many researchers think that this problem is not merely hard, but impossible.



ABOVE: Anil Seth delivering a talk on consciousness in Attenborough Centre for Creative Arts.

However, in recent history, a vibrant new science of consciousness has taken shape. This has largely been possible thanks to new tools of brain imaging and computational modelling that allow researchers to experimentally study the intimate relationship between the brain and consciousness. Whether these experiments will solve – or dissolve – the hard problem remains to be seen, but the scientific game is most certainly on.

When I came to Sussex in the mid-90s to pursue a Masters, I was already fixated on the problem of consciousness. It was clear that progress on such a fundamental mystery would require uniting many different disciplines. Psychology and neuroscience – the topics of my first degree – wouldn’t cut it alone. My Masters in computer science turned into a PhD, during which I ranged into philosophy, evolutionary computing, cybernetics and more. This multidisciplinary training has been central to the development of my consciousness theories.

In 2010, Professor of Psychiatry Hugo Critchley and I established one of the world’s first consciousness research centres, positioning Sussex as an international leader in the field. This initiative has now been reborn as the Sussex Centre for Consciousness Science, one of the University’s 12 Centres of Excellence.

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We build explanatory bridges from the details of neural circuits to specific aspects of consciousness.
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We continue to embrace an interdisciplinary ethos – the Centre is based across the Schools of Engineering and Informatics, Psychology, Philosophy and Brighton and Sussex Medical School – and the research is extremely diverse. It ranges from developing new mathematical measures of ‘complexity’ and ‘emergence’ that potentially track how conscious someone is, to advances in the philosophy of mind and artificial intelligence (AI), to detailed psychological experiments that tease apart the factors that influence what people are conscious of when they are conscious – and much more. This diversity of methods and objectives is critical. A centre like ours needs to be open to new ideas, rather than pursuing a single theory or exploiting a single method.

That said, my work focuses on ideas that have been brewing for well over a decade, inspired by many collaborations with colleagues. Here’s the approach: rather than look for some ‘special sauce’ that explains how consciousness arises from non-conscious elements, we build explanatory bridges from the details of neural circuits to specific aspects of consciousness. By explaining why conscious experiences are the way they are, the hope is that the sense of mystery surrounding consciousness will eventually vanish in a puff of metaphysical smoke.

Something like this already happened in how our understanding of life developed. Instead of finding the ‘vital essence’ that distinguished the living from the non-living, biologists explained the properties of living systems – metabolism, homeostasis, etc. – in terms of physics and chemistry. The hard problem of life wasn’t solved, it was dissolved. I’m optimistic that the same may hold for consciousness.

This is where another key idea comes in: that the brain is a ‘prediction machine’ and that every conscious experience is a form of perceptual inference, or ‘best-guessing’. In this view, experiences of the world – and of the self – are not direct readouts of the way the world is, or the way the body is. Instead, the brain is continually making predictions about the causes of sensory signals – those that originate in the world and those that come from the body – and treating the sensory signals as ‘prediction errors’ to update these predictions. Perceptual experience becomes a ‘controlled hallucination’ in which the brain’s best guesses are reined in by sensory signals. We actively construct our worlds and our selves – we don’t passively perceive them.

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We actively construct our worlds and our selves – we don’t passively perceive them.
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This view of consciousness has many implications. Here are a few. First, the self isn’t that which does the perceiving; rather, the self is itself a collection of perceptions. This is true even for what we call ‘free will’. Second, we never see the world ‘as it is’. We see it in ways that are useful for staying alive, shaped by our evolutionary history. Third, because we all have different brains, we will all experience a unique, subjectively distinctive world, even for the same shared objective reality. Mapping out ‘perceptual diversity’ is something we are doing in an ambitious new project called The Perception Census, which has already attracted over 30,000 participants from more than 100 countries.

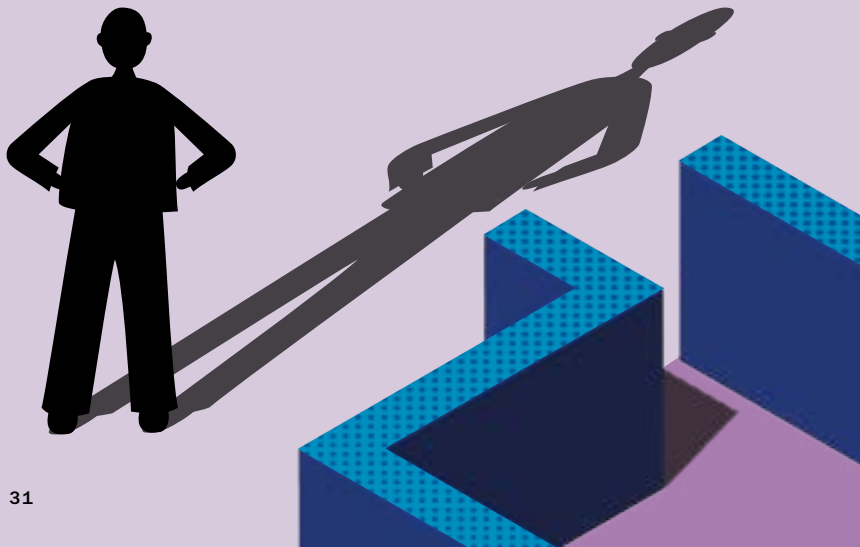
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Perceptual experience becomes a ‘controlled hallucination’ in which the brain’s best guesses are reined in by sensory signals.
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The prospect of developing a scientific understanding of consciousness is hugely exciting. What makes it even more exciting is how this quest is impacting many aspects of society. Within medicine, a deeper understanding of perceptual experience offers powerful new ways to understand and even treat mental health disorders. For immersive technologies, the dramatic acceleration of AI is already raising questions about whether computers could ever be conscious, and only a mature science of consciousness can provide actionable answers. Ethical questions about animal welfare and moral status at the beginning and end of human life all turn on assumptions about when consciousness is present (and if so, what it might be like). In law, whether we hold people responsible for their actions depends on concepts of free will that are increasingly outdated if the self is viewed as a collection of perceptions. A deeper recognition of perceptual diversity can help build new platforms for empathy and understanding.

At the Centre, we pursue the basic science of consciousness and its broader impacts. We’re eager to bring the excitement of consciousness science to wider audiences. Fortunately, many people find consciousness intrinsically fascinating (most people are, after all, interested in themselves!). That said, communicating complex concepts is never easy, and pursuing excellence in public engagement is something we are proud of.

In 2022, we co-developed a project called Dreamachine, which enabled around 40,000 people to safely experience vivid visual hallucinations using a combination of stroboscopic lighting and spatial sound. In March 2024, I delivered the annual Royal Society Michael Faraday Lecture on the topic of consciousness – again reflecting a deep and widely-held interest in this profound mystery.

Will we ever fully solve the mystery of consciousness? It’s hard to know. What’s clear is that consciousness research is already changing our understanding of human experience, both in society at large and to each of us individually. The ability to experience the world – and the self – is the everyday miracle that brings meaning to our brief moments in the light of existence.



Research news

Research with impact is at the heart of Sussex’s strategic framework. Our interdisciplinary and collaborative approach brings creative and innovative solutions to local, national and global issues. Here, we profile some of the latest developments and findings to come out of Sussex.

Research news in brief

All aboard the Sussex Brain Bus!

In March 2023, people from Brighton & Hove were invited to hop aboard the Sussex Brain Bus, a joint project between psychology researchers at the University of Sussex and local artist Daniel Locke. Emblazoned with art and information about **DEMENTIA RESEARCH AND TIPS FOR KEEPING BRAINS HEALTHY**, the initiative was supported by a £25,000 funding boost from Alzheimer’s Research UK’s flagship public outreach scheme, the Inspire Fund.

Babies bias for Van Gogh

Research from the University’s ‘Baby Lab’ suggests some of our **ADULT ARTISTIC PREFERENCES ARE PRESENT FROM AS YOUNG AS FOUR MONTHS OLD**. Sussex psychologists showed pairs of Van Gogh’s landscapes to baby and adult participants, recorded the amount of time infants looked at each painting and asked adult participants which they found the most pleasant. The results showed distinct shared artistic preferences between the adult and baby participants.

Sussex scientists develop a more efficient way to transmit data between devices

Sussex researchers have developed an **ALTERNATIVE WAY TO TRANSMIT DATA AT CLOSE RANGE BETWEEN MOBILE PHONES AND OTHER TECH DEVICES** using short-range electric waves, rather than electromagnetic waves that Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and 5G currently rely on. Electric waves consume much less power, yet maintain the high throughput needed for multimedia applications.

Watching TV can be good for you

A *Radio Times* research project called The Screen Test, carried out in association with the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton and involving 21,000 respondents, has found that **WATCHING TV CAN PROVIDE A POSITIVE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION**, with levels of excitement increasing by 10% and happiness by 5%, while levels of anxiety decreased by 6%.



KINDNESS FIRST

Sussex launches UK’s first centre on the study of kindness

In March 2023, the University publicly launched the UK’s first academic research centre dedicated to the study of kindness.

The Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness brings together researchers from across the University with expertise in psychology, business, education, social work, medical practice and media to investigate the impact of kindness on people and communities.

The formation of the Centre builds on existing expertise and various research being conducted into the study of kindness at the University. This includes The Kindness Test, a project led by a team of researchers in the Centre, in partnership with BBC Radio 4. Its aim is to learn more about how people’s attitudes and experiences might vary across different groups, and how experiences of kindness might relate to health, wellbeing and other social and psychological experiences.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Professor Robin Banerjee, Dr Gillian Sandstrom and BBC broadcaster and Visiting Professor Claudia Hammond at the public launch of the Sussex Centre for Research on Kindness.

CANCER SCIENCE

A step towards early cancer diagnosis

New research by Professor of Cancer Cell Signalling Georgios Giamas and his team could be the first step towards facilitating early cancer diagnosis, as well as the development of more effective treatments in combating the disease.

Professor Giamas’ current research focuses on breast cancer and brain cancer, especially glioblastoma, one of the most aggressive types of brain tumour with extremely low survival rates. Early diagnosis is crucial, yet glioblastoma is often diagnosed late.

“We are working on a liquid biopsy to spot deep-tissue cancers,” says Georgios. “What this means is, rather than taking a tissue sample, doctors could take a small blood sample

and test for a range of biomarkers that can help identify the presence of cancer.”

The key benefits are that it’s less invasive than a traditional tissue biopsy (which is difficult to take in the case of brain tumours), more cost-effective, generates results faster, and requires less work than traditional diagnostic tests.

Furthermore, in January 2024, Georgios’ and Professor John Spencer’s spin-out biotechnology company, Stingray Bio, entered into an evaluation agreement with ValiRx – a life science company focusing on early-stage cancer therapeutics and women’s health – to test the suitability of a cancer treatment technology for commercialisation.

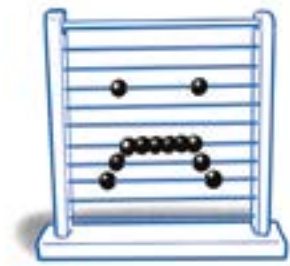
BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMICS

‘Maths anxiety’ causes students to disengage

A new Sussex study has revealed that ‘maths anxiety’ can lead to student disengagement and create significant barriers to learning.

According to the charity National Numeracy, over a third of adults in the UK report feeling worried or stressed when faced with maths, a condition known as maths anxiety. The paper, *Understanding mathematics anxiety: loss aversion and student engagement*, finds that teaching that relies on negative framing – such as punishing students for failure or humiliating them for being disengaged – is more likely to exacerbate maths anxiety and disengagement.

The paper says that to successfully engage students in maths, educators and parents must build a safe environment for trial and error and allow students the space to make mistakes before the threat of failure becomes debilitating.



LIFE SCIENCES

Capturing the coloured world that animals see

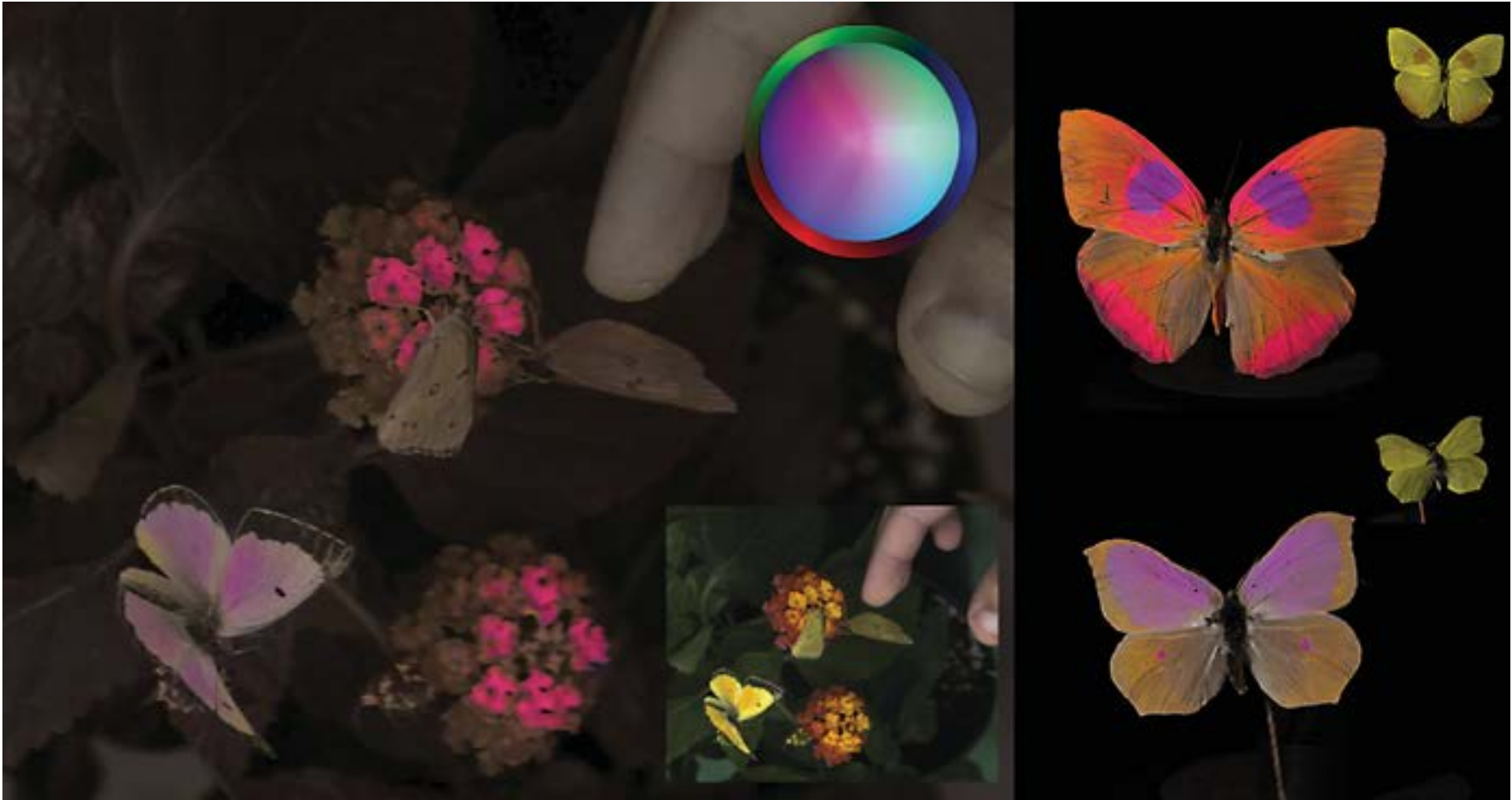
Researchers at the University of Sussex and colleagues from the George Mason University, Virginia, USA, have developed a new video camera system that accurately replicates the colours that different animals see in natural settings.

In a paper published in *PLOS Biology*, researchers explain how they developed a new camera and software system that captures animal-view videos of moving objects under natural lighting conditions. The team tested the system against a traditional method and found that the new system predicted perceived colours with an accuracy of over 92%.

The camera simultaneously records videos in four colour channels: blue, green, red and UV.

This data can be processed into 'perceptual units', i.e. units of photoreceptor responses, to produce an accurate video of how those colours are perceived by animals, based on existing knowledge of the photoreceptors in their eyes. For example, honeybees and some species of bird can see UV, which is outside the range of human perception. Reconstructing the colours that animals see can help scientists better understand how they communicate and navigate the world around them.

The system is built from commercially available cameras, and the software is available open source, allowing other researchers to use and build on the technology in the future.



WELLBEING AT WORK

Four 'super' actions for keeping on top of work emails

A new study conducted by the University of Sussex Business School, together with academics from Loughborough University and ESCP Business School, Madrid, has analysed 25 years of academic research to identify the four actions people should take to improve wellbeing and productivity while staying on top of emails.

Published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, the study looked at findings from 62 empirical papers that use action regulation theory – how we regulate our behaviour in the pursuit of different goals – to develop a framework that offers practical recommendations to both organisations and individuals.

The researchers identified four super actions: communicate work email access boundaries; regularly check and review your inbox; only use work email to send work-relevant communications; and be civil, courteous and considerate in work email exchanges.



MATERIALS PHYSICS

One small material, one leap towards sustaining life on Mars

Sussex researchers have discovered the transformative potential of Martian nanomaterials, potentially opening the door to sustainable habitation on the red planet.

Using resources and techniques currently applied on the International Space Station and by NASA, Dr Conor Boland, a lecturer in Materials Physics at Sussex, led a research group that investigated the potential of nanomaterials – tiny components thousands of times smaller than a human hair – for clean energy production and building materials on Mars.

Taking what was considered a waste product by NASA and applying only sustainable production methods, including water-based chemistry and low-energy processes, the researchers successfully identified electrical properties within gypsum nanomaterials, opening the door to potential clean energy and sustainable technology production on Mars.



RIGHT: Mars rocks, vials of Mars rock nanobelts in water, nanobelts.

EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Toolkit to help children deal with climate change uncertainty

A team of Sussex researchers has published a free toolkit for teachers to educate and help school pupils manage uncertainty in modern life, with a particular focus on climate change.

The toolkit, called 'Creating with Uncertainty: sustainability education resources for a changing world', includes teaching resources, activities and films for teachers at both primary and secondary schools, and can be accessed via the University's Open Access publishing platform.

The aim of the toolkit is to support students in becoming comfortable with issues that are uncertain or ambiguous, and to engage them philosophically and practically to work towards a more sustainable world.

Alongside the written education pack, the project team has also released seven accompanying films featuring school workshops and interviews with academics, teachers and students to help teachers consider how to teach the topic.



Growing up online

While the introduction of new legislation that allows children more control over the content they see online is promising, understanding how best to help children navigate wellbeing in a digital context has never been more important.

WORDS BY CHRIS RALLS

The ongoing challenge is how to involve children when finding ways to navigate a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

Sussex's Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) engages with children and young people to better understand societal issues affecting their welfare. Drawing upon a broad spectrum of expertise from the social sciences and arts to psychology and law, CIRCY addresses themes that include children's participation, digital childhoods, emotional lives, (extra)ordinary children and methodological innovations.

The Centre's Childhood and Youth: Theory and Practice BA (Hons) course has been ranked number one in the UK for Childhood and Youth Studies in the Complete University Guide 2024 and CIRCY is recognised as one of the University's Centres of Excellence. It's an acknowledgement that Dr Liam Berriman, Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies in the Department of Social Work & Social Care and CIRCY's newly appointed Director, believes opens exciting opportunities.

"We've done a lot of work internally to build up our connections and put CIRCY on a more international footing so we can collaborate on bigger projects addressing bigger problems," he says. "Prior to Covid, our research seminars were well attended by local practitioners and children's charities, so we're now re-establishing these and embedding CIRCY within local Sussex communities."

Liam's research focuses on how an increasingly data-driven society is experienced by young people, and how they navigate wellbeing in a digital landscape. "There is a narrative in society about what is safe and good for children in a digital context," he explains. "As well as the risk of encountering strangers online, a young person may feel socially isolated because they've been excluded from online chat groups or find it difficult to turn off their phone at bedtime."

However, Liam is keen to stress the need to balance such issues with benefits. "It's important to recognise the positive sides of the technology. For example, we know that LGBTQ+ young people and other minorities are likely to find community in a digital space, and that it provides information that young people can be scared to ask about within their family or peer group."

Building a climate of trust and enquiry with young people is critical to the success of CIRCY's research. This includes finding ways to engage children on things that directly impact their lives, like education or social care, as well as global issues like climate change. Together with Professor Rachel Thomson, Liam developed a project for children and families to create their own digital archives that capture a significant moment in their lives. "We've also explored the use of mobile phones to document children's experiences as these approaches tell us a lot about their lives over time and their future aspirations," he says.

Parents and carers play an important role in CIRCY's research and their consultation helps to better understand generational gaps, perceived risks and the need to adapt to emerging technologies. Parents often share photos and videos of their children online without appreciating the complexities of children's consent. As part of the Junior Research Associate scheme, one of Liam's students, Yanna Erikson, addressed this issue in relation to autistic children. She recorded the reactions of focus groups to videos uploaded by parents who wanted to convey the challenges of bringing up an autistic child without appreciating the potential impact on the child in question.

CIRCY's approach includes helping public sector organisations to design data practices that transform children's lives.

Focusing on the digital wellbeing of minorities is key to CIRCY's approach. This includes helping public sector organisations to design data practices that transform children's lives. Data collection is an area that Liam feels has become increasingly commodified, with governments showing a lack of understanding in relation to young people's needs: "The past few years have seen a massive expansion in data collected on children for commercial exploitation. It's very concerning. Meanwhile, policy makers tend to treat young people as one homogenous group, disregarding the huge variety of needs represented. A digital 'safe space' for an autistic young person will be very different from one for an LGBTQ+ young person. CIRCY works to identify what an inclusive digital world might look like."

There is room, however, for cautious optimism following the implementation of the Online Safety Act of 2023. "I think the fact that it holds companies accountable is a really positive direction of travel, but the extent to which this law acts as an incentive is uncertain at this stage," he says. Looking to the future, Liam and his colleagues plan to explore the challenges presented by artificial intelligence technology and algorithms by working with secondary school pupils to see how it may change young people's perceptions of their own futures. For Liam, the ongoing challenge is how to involve children when finding ways to navigate a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

"Things get designed for children rather than with them," he says. "My question to people who are working with children's data or designing digital tools is, how are you bringing children into the process to make tools that benefit them?"



Soundscapes

Doctors have listened to the health of our bodily systems for millennia. Now we are making digital stethoscopes to listen to the health of our ecosystems.

WORDS BY PROFESSOR ALICE ELDRIDGE

All eyes are on climate change, but we are also entering the sixth great extinction. The positive news is that there are an increasing number of initiatives regionally, nationally and globally to support biodiversity recovery. But how do we know whether these interventions are working? And how can we monitor changes in our forests, soil systems, reefs, rivers and ponds at scale? Working with colleagues in the Sussex Digital Humanities Lab, Sussex AI and the Sussex Sustainability Research Programme, we are one of a growing number of groups globally that is learning to listen to ecosystems.

Across the tree of life, species communicate using sound in order to stay alive: finding mates, defending territory, warning of predators, calling for food, etc. The emerging ecological science of ecoacoustics studies the whole acoustic environment – or soundscape – to understand the ecological role of sound.

“One strand of our research is focused on tools to analyse vast, complex, multispecies symphonies of wind, songs, stridulations and traffic.”

The soundscape is a highly dynamic pattern that emerges from the interaction of the sounds of biological, geophysical and anthropogenic processes: insects thrumming, birds calling, trees rustling and motors throbbing. These sounds combine to create soundscapes that are unique in time and space; think of the differences between sounds during morning rush hour and an evening on a beach. Unique acoustic signatures occur not only in human habitats but in natural ecosystems everywhere, below water and underground, including ponds, reefs and even soil ecosystems.

We now recognise that sound is a key ecological resource – just like food, water and space – which means it is also a source of information about the interactions that shape a given ecosystem and its status. In evolutionary terms, if members of a species can't hear each other, they can't mate, so there is pressure to occupy a unique acoustic niche. According to this line of reasoning, greater biodiversity will lead to greater acoustic diversity in the emergent soundscape.

The equipment to record is now robust and affordable. Collecting soundscape data – even of kilometres square over weeks, months and years – is relatively simple. Analysing it and understanding it is harder. One strand of our research is focused on tools to analyse these vast, complex, multispecies symphonies of wind, songs, stridulations and traffic. How best to do this and exactly what aspect of ecosystem health it describes remains an open question.



LEFT: Children listening to pond life.
BELOW: Professor Alice Eldridge

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Sound is a key ecological resource – just like food, water and space – which means it is also a source of information about the interactions that shape a given ecosystem and its status.
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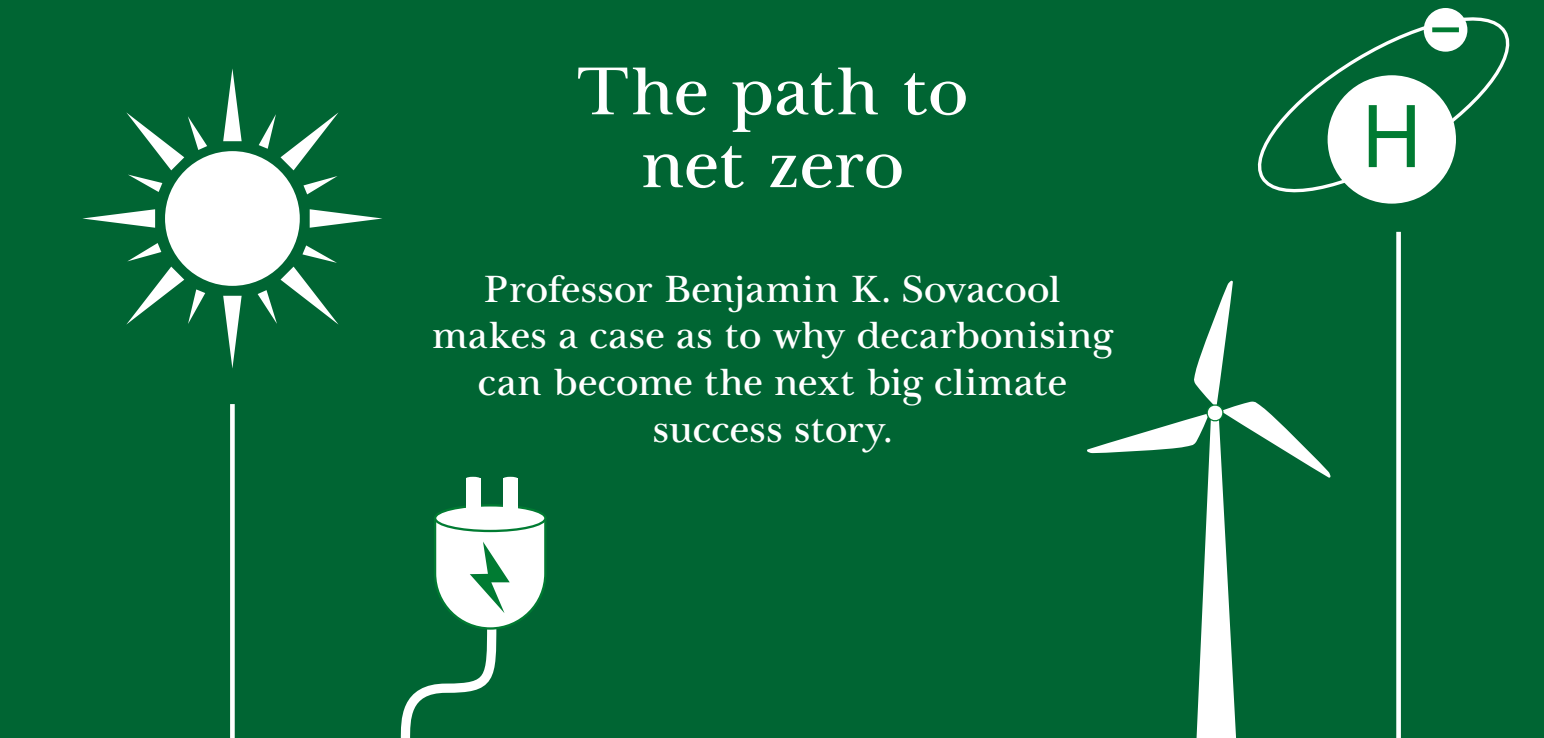
Our current research in analysis follows two distinct approaches. In one, we are creating new artificial intelligence models to *learn* ways to describe the differences in soundscapes between degraded and healthy ecosystems. Under a more speculative approach, we collaborate with colleagues in neuroscience to explore whether the *dynamics* of soundscapes might tell us more about ecological status than simply the diversity of sounds.

Whilst we are developing new technologies for eavesdropping on ecosystems, for some communities, listening to ecosystems is nothing new at all. When working in Indonesia with a local reef restoration project to explore the potential for digital listening, I asked the local marine biologist whether he thought we could hear the difference between healthy and degraded reefs. “Oh yes,” he said, “when we night fish, we put the end of the oar on our ear. When we hear what sounds like rain, we know we are on the reef where the fish are.” These resonances between traditional ecological knowledge and technoscientific approaches are encouraging. If we can co-create affordable tools that integrate the strengths of each way of knowing, there are possibilities to empower community conservation efforts for the benefit of people and planet.

For urban societies, digital soundscapes can also help people to reconnect to wider nature with great benefit. Our work explores soundscape listening in education, cultural events and online experiments. In an ongoing project with flagship nature recovery project, Knepp Wilding, anyone anywhere is invited to tune in online to Wilding Radio to hear a livestream of the soundscapes above and below water from the developing wetland area created by beavers. It’s popular, reaching audiences of 15,000 in 2023 alone. Emerging research shows that simply listening to natural soundscapes is a powerful way to reconnect with nature that also helps to reduce stress and promote pro-environmental behaviours.

Our daily soundscape is a site of interaction between the elements, life and human-created technologies. It provides a rich space to better understand interrelations between the environment, society, culture and technology. We are developing an approach to studying the soundscape in a transdisciplinary way, because we believe that by developing technologies to listen to the rest of the living world and engaging people in that process, we can take a small step to tackle both the consequences and causes of current ecological crises, and help create a world where people and planet thrive as one.

Sussex Digital Humanities Lab, Sussex AI and Sussex Sustainability Research Programme are University of Sussex Centres of Excellence. To find out more about the Lab and the Centres, visit www.sussex.ac.uk/falmer



The path to net zero

Professor Benjamin K. Sovacool makes a case as to why decarbonising can become the next big climate success story.

An enormous challenge loomed over the 2024 COP28 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai in January: decarbonising the global economy at speed and scale. Many will criticise global efforts as being too slow, too partial or too ineffective. However, there is significant room for optimism.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – the most powerful and influential scientific body examining the state of climate science – we have a fruitful array of mitigation options that can significantly reduce emissions rapidly and cost effectively. Their most recent synthesis report charted no less than “dozens” of commercially available options cutting across energy, land use, buildings, transport and industry. Many of these emissions reductions – such as the adoption of wind and solar power, the diffusion of electric vehicles and a focus on demand management – will be achieved through the state-centred system grounded in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The positive news is that many countries are taking steps forward. The recently passed Inflation Reduction Act in the United States includes approximately \$80 billion per year in climate spending from 2022-2027, with provisions to spur clean technology deployment and incentivise emissions reductions across industrial sectors. The bill targets hard-to-decarbonise industries, with tax credits and programmes for the development and deployment of clean hydrogen production and carbon capture usage and storage.

However, there is even room for optimism beyond the UNFCCC system. Concerted efforts are occurring across different stakeholders and non-state actors – that is, sub-national entities and their institutional kin – which are becoming increasingly important as political, economic and environmental threats and harms increasingly globalise. Non-state actors – e.g. companies, associations, international organisations, civil society, cities and regions – have emerged to undertake a range of climate mitigation actions. Collectively, these plans and actions, if fully implemented, have the potential to bring the world back on track with a 2°C pathway. Our analysis reveals 25 single initiatives that could total up to emissions reductions in 2030 consistent with a 2°C pathway.

These non-state actors can achieve a range of reductions from 31.81 billion tons to 37.31 billion tons of carbon dioxide. The three most significant potentials in terms of emissions reductions or scope relate to forestry, cities and regions. The most critical collection of actors or actor types is businesses and the private sector. The most significant sector is renewable energy followed by multi-sectoral initiatives, with comparatively fewer reductions coming from energy efficiency, transport, buildings or non-CO2 emissions.

Consequently, there are promising technologies and innovations that can drive deep and accelerated decarbonisation across the global economy, such as renewable energy, energy efficiency and better land use management. It’s a theme that will be explored by Sussex’s newly formed Bennet Institute for Innovation and Policy Acceleration. Moreover, sub-national actors are already undertaking a massive mobilisation of finance, technology and political will targeting net zero pathways over the next two decades.

With bold leadership from countries and other actors, smart policy and massive investments in technology and human capital, decarbonising can become the next big climate success story.



Professor Benjamin K. Sovacool is Director of the Bennett Centre for Innovation and Policy Acceleration and Professor of Energy Policy at the Science Policy Research Unit in the University of Sussex Business School.

Candid

conversations

Artist, filmmaker and writer Topher Campbell (Intellectual History 1983) was matched with Jordi M. Carter (Drama and Film Studies 2018) in 2022 as part of the Sussex Connect Global Mentoring Programme. Topher was awarded an honorary doctorate from Sussex in 2017. He has volunteered his time to the Black at Sussex programme and sits on the School of Media, Arts and Humanities Impact Advisory Board.

Jordi's career has continued to rise since his 2021 graduation. He was appointed the first Co-Artistic Director & CEO of Boundless Theatre at the age of 23, and took part as a mentor and mentee in Sussex's Global Mentoring Programme.

On a rainy day in London, Jordi and Topher met up to share their perspectives on the value of mentoring and the positive impact their relationship has had.

WORDS BY APRIL WILSON

Topher

I've always been an informal mentor. To be asked, as an alumnus, to give a formal mentoring session was intriguing to me. I was also interested to meet a fellow alum of the younger generation who is, like me, queer, Black and in the arts.

Jordi's career is amazing. He's very good at knowing the right people and I could understand the way in which he probably moves around the world. Working in the creative field is not necessarily how people think it is. There are a lot of edges to negotiate, and many ways in which you can be cornered by other people's strong ideals and agendas, especially when you are Black and queer.

As a mentor, the structure in my head was simply to allow Jordi to ask whatever he wanted and to respond as best I could. There was no agenda in our sessions, I wanted to be as open as possible. I have memories of being a trainee director, but I wanted to see how different Jordi's experience has been and to hear his perspective, which I've learnt from hugely.

I remember when I was young, and as someone without parents, your friends were your family. I've often thought about Stuart Hall's phrase regarding notions of radical homelessness: that you lean into the fact you don't belong and discover different homes because of it.

For anyone thinking about approaching a mentor, if you've got a favourite person out there, find them and make it happen. Most people like to talk about what they do. It's also useful to have an exit community. There are lots of people that I didn't know went to Sussex, I would have really benefited from that.

“
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I've had informal mentors for the past seven years. After graduating I realised how important it is to have someone to be a sounding board.

I had ideas of what I wanted to discuss with Topher. In between each session, I'd think about what I was experiencing at the time and bring them to him as topics of conversation. I like hearing people's opinions and finding where I fit. Or don't fit. It helps me to figure out how to proceed with my career and in building relationships with people.

I don't generally go into things with many expectations. I don't mean that negatively, I'm just very open. I remember in our first session I was figuring out whether to show how vulnerable I was, because I was coming out of a dark place prior to starting the programme. I just thought Topher was really open. It's refreshing to have someone from his generation be so willing to listen to someone from my generation.

I don't think I would be where I am at today if it wasn't for my friends. I guess everything I didn't get from my family has been more than made up for by the friends and mentors in my life.

I think it's nice at this point in my career to have been validated and affirmed in my conversations with Topher. I feel calmer about my process, my direction and my trajectory. I'm grateful to have been a part of the mentoring scheme and to have had the conversations we've had. In terms of our relationship, it has definitely progressed beyond the programme.

My advice to anyone considering taking part in the mentoring scheme is to think about the best thing that can happen from you reaching out. And if you don't know where to begin, LinkedIn and Sussex Connect are great spaces to start. Find someone and connect with them.

“
Topher was really open.
It's refreshing to have someone from
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”

The Global Mentoring Programme is run by the University of Sussex Development and Alumni Relations Office and typically runs in the autumn term. Sign up to Sussex Connect at www.sussexconnect.org to be notified about the next programme.

Jordi



Reunited, and it feels so good

Picture this: laughter echoing across Library Square, coloured light pouring out of the Meeting House windows, embraces shared between old friends and memories flooding back in a wave of nostalgia.

SHARED EXPERIENCES

Each year, groups of University of Sussex alumni get together in gatherings that span continents and cultures to reminisce and reconnect with one another and their younger selves.

One glance at the snapshots from these reunions and you'll see the warmth and camaraderie that is the hallmark of our Sussex family. From the Mountaineering Club reunion nestled amidst the familiar landscape of our campus, to the alumni gathering in bustling Washington DC, each reunion has a unique history, bound by the thread of shared experiences and enduring friendships.

Set against the campus backdrop of rolling hills and Basil Spence architecture, members of the Mountaineering Club swap tales of daring climbs and shared triumphs. Meanwhile, a group of Kent House alumni stand proudly beside the Sir Harry Kroto blue plaque, a poignant reminder of the pioneering spirit of Sussex.

Sussex reunions extend far beyond our beautiful campus, reflecting the global nature of the Sussex family. In the bustling streets of Tokyo, alumni from SPRU recently came together to reminisce about late nights in the library and the groundbreaking research that shaped their careers. Despite the miles that separate them, their connection to Sussex remains strong.



In Vienna, one of our alumni volunteer consuls, Massimo Toschi, takes the reins of a diverse group – including a married couple who met at Sussex and a dog named Fridolin – who meet to reminisce about Sussex days and hear from guest speaker and fellow alumnus Professor Yusaf Akbar. In Nairobi, International Officer Khalid Abbas and consul Victor Waweru host a gathering full of smiles that say it all.

The success of the events is testament to the power of community and the dedication of the volunteers who work behind the scenes to keep our Sussex family connected around the world.

ALUMNI MEMORIES

Alumni entering the venue of the reunion jumped into full Sussex mode and mood – as if we had a time travel machine. We experienced both of Sussex's beloved atmospheres: an academic intellectual event and a spontaneous follow-up networking gathering at the pub! We agreed it was necessary to meet again soon to continue the conversations... but this is to be continued because... Sussex University spirit never ends!

MASSIMO TOSCHI (EURO 1992)

It's those shared experiences [that keep bringing us back together]. The clash of different ages and nationalities that generate stories, good memories and lifelong friendships.

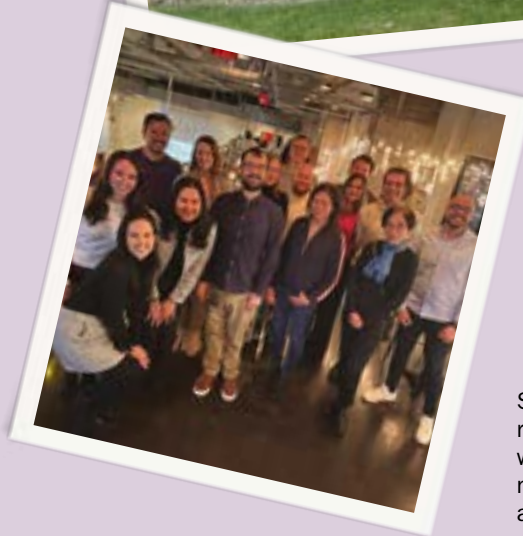
PHILIP WORSFOLD (GEOGRAPHY 1996)

To date our group of the class of 68/69 have returned to Brighton as a group no less than four times. We also have regular reunions in our various hometowns/cities scattered all over the UK and in France! It is our shared experiences at Sussex which binds us together: we grew up together during our first time living away from home; we laughed and cried together; we learned together; we shared the excitement of going to one of the most radical universities at that time, in more ways than one.

CHRISTINE PINDER (GEOGRAPHY 1968)

THIS PAGE (top to bottom): The Vienna alumni reunion organised by Massimo Toschi. Physics alumni reunite to celebrate the 20th anniversary of starting at Sussex. Alumni reunion in Washington DC organised by Lopaka Purdy.

OPPOSITE (top to bottom): Kent House alumni Richard Houdmont and John Parsons. The mountaineering club reunion organised by Bob Godden. Alumni reunite in Nairobi, Kenya.

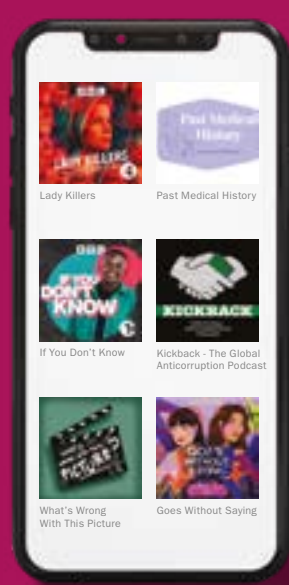


REACH OUT AND RECONNECT

So, as you look at these snapshots of reunions past, let your memories of Sussex wash over you. And if you find yourself feeling nostalgic, longing to reconnect with old friends and relive those Sussex days, know that you are not alone. Reach out! After all, the best reunions are the ones yet to come.

Find guidance on organising your own reunion on campus at www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni/community/alumni-reunions

Or reach out to your local alumni consul to connect with Sussex alumni near you at www.sussex.ac.uk/alumni/overseas/



Alumni library

PODCASTS

DR LUCY WORSLEY OBE (HISTORY OF ART 1997), *Lady Killers with Lucy Worsley*. Lucy and a crack team of female detectives investigate the crimes of women from the 19th and 20th centuries from a contemporary, feminist perspective.

EVELYN O'ROURKE (BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE 2014), *Past Medical History*. Current medical student Evelyn talks to doctors about their lives and careers, starting with medical school and how it helped shape their futures. They explore the challenges they face in their careers and offer advice to current students and newly qualified doctors.

KAMILAH MCINNIS (SOCIOLOGY 2013), *If You Don't Know*. Kamilah produces, edits and mixes this podcast, presented by De-Graft Mensah, which brings listeners the Black voices, stories and biggest laughs that aren't always heard in mainstream news.

KickBack – The Global Anticorruption Podcast. Housed in The Centre for the Study of Corruption, this podcast series features guests ranging from Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists to former FBI agents.

LINSAY MCCULLOCH (FILM STUDIES 2018), *What's Wrong With This Picture*. Linsay and her podcast partner Garry Mulholland explore the joy of strange cinema, analysing the best weird and wonderful films of the last century, from Britain to Hollywood, and beyond.

PERSEPHONE DEACON (ENGLISH AND FILM STUDIES 2016) and ERIN EMIRALI (ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORY 2016), *Goes Without Saying*. This podcast focuses on conversations that are often left unsaid from societal expectations, the politics of TikTok trends and mental health.

BOOKS

MARINA MAHATHIR (INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS 1976), *The Apple and the Tree: Life as Dr Mahathir's Daughter*, Penguin Books. Marina is a Malaysian political activist and writer. Named 2010 UN Person of the Year, she is an AIDS advocacy worker and was president of the Malaysian AIDS Council for 12 years. In this book, she details how she navigated her life as the daughter of the man who governed Malaysia for almost 24 years, struggling at times to find her own identity.

CLIVE MYRIE (LAW 1982), *Everything is Everything*, Hodder & Stoughton. In his deeply personal memoir, BBC presenter and foreign correspondent Clive Myrie reflects on how being Black has affected his perspective on issues he has encountered in 30 years' reporting on some of the biggest stories of our time.

LINDSEY DODD (EURO 1996), *Feeling Memory: Remembering Wartime Childhoods in France*, Columbia University Press. Historian Lindsey Dodd draws on the recorded oral narratives of a hundred people to examine the variety of experiences children had during World War II. Her book contributes to the understanding of children's lives in war, and the use of memory in historical and oral history analysis.

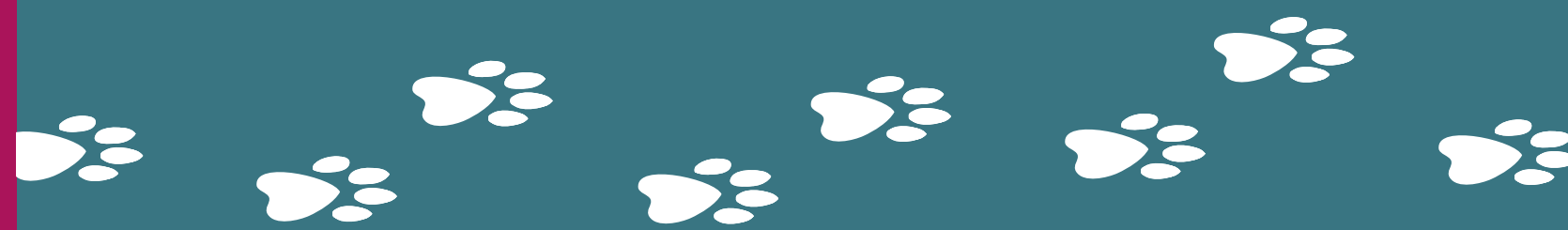
CARIAD LLOYD (ENGLISH 2001), *You Are Not Alone*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc. In *You Are Not Alone*, Cariad shares all that she has learned from her award-winning podcast *Griefcast*. She reflects on her own grief, the grief of others, and the psychology and science behind how our society deals with death and loss.

SHEELA BANERJEE (AFRAS 1986), *What's in a Name?*, Sceptre. Sheela blends history, memoir and politics as she unravels the personal histories of friends and family through their names. And while tracing their heritage across centuries and continents – from west London to British India, and from 1960s Jamaica to pre-Revolutionary Russia – Sheela also tells the story of 20th-century immigration to the UK.

LISA FRANSSON (RUSSIAN AND LINGUISTICS 1995), *The Shape of Guilt*, Epoque Press. In her native Swedish, Lisa is an award-winning children's author. *The Shape of Guilt* is her first novel in English and explores the story of Robert Bunny, a toy rabbit, as he observes the decline of a family he wants to become a part of.

The secret life of vets

Veterinary social work is an emerging and growing field in other countries, but the UK is yet to catch up. Rebecca Stephens explains her reasons as to why placing social workers within veterinary settings should be made an area of focus.



Veterinary medicine and social work practice have historically been distinct disciplines in the UK. Although there is established evidence of the strength of the human-animal bond, there is an opportunity for professionals in both disciplines to incorporate a more species-spanning practice approach.

The term 'veterinary social worker' was first coined by Dr Elizabeth Strand at the University of Tennessee, USA, in 2002 and has since achieved recognition as a legitimate career pathway for social workers in the USA and Canada. Veterinary social work is defined as an area of social work practice that supports and strengthens interdisciplinary partnerships that attend to the intersection of humans and animals. It was originally established to expand social work knowledge, skills and ethical practice in supporting the human-animal bond.

Whilst veterinarians are adept to care for and treat sick, injured and dying animals, there are often heightened emotions presenting from pet owners. Veterinarians are regularly faced with people's complex feelings, financial worries and conflictual interactions arising from difficult decisions involving animals. From my interactions with veterinary colleagues and knowledge of the mental health crisis within this profession, it's not surprising that many veterinarians' emotional wellbeing can be negatively affected from their work experiences.

Crisis intervention, trauma-informed approaches and bereavement support, among others, are core areas of traditional social work practice in the UK. However, I also believe there is a role for social workers to support the emotional needs that arise from working with and caring for animals, both for veterinarians and their human clients.

The four core areas of veterinary social work – intentional wellness, the link between human and animal violence, animal-related bereavement and grief, and animal-assisted interventions – were developed from established evidence of the needs that arise from human and animal relationships and the emotional impact of practice on veterinarians. It covers a broad spectrum – from the emotional support that veterinary social workers provide to veterinarians, and the guidance that veterinary social workers give to staff and clients regarding animal violence and safeguarding – to difficult care decisions around animal end-of-life and pet-loss support, and facilitating human-animal interactions where the animal is a collaborative member of a therapeutic experience.

I have established a strong peer network of veterinarians and social workers nationally, through which current research, resources and new ideas are shared to promote the development of veterinary social work in the UK.

I also use empirical research and surveys, consultancy and speaking engagements to actively establish partnerships involving social workers and veterinarians nationally and internationally. In my current roles, I lead working groups, undertake research and collaborate with veterinary professionals to find opportunities for veterinarians and social workers to learn with and from each other, as well as incorporate themes relating to human-animal interactions within the social work curriculum and practitioner training.

As I continue to strengthen this new interdisciplinary alliance and develop further educational opportunities to establish veterinary social work in the UK, attending to the health and welfare needs of humans and animals will become a more collaborative effort.



Rebecca Stephens is Senior Lecturer in Social Work in the School of Education and Social Work and Co-Director of Education for the International Association of Veterinary Social Workers.



ABOVE: The unknown Polish refugee knapping flint on site.
BELOW: The old barn on Forty Acre Tenant Laine.

From quarry

The Neolithic flint mines found in and around Sussex are among Britain’s most important prehistoric monuments. Lecturer in Art History Dr Alistair Grant (Art History 1983) reveals the history and personal journey behind Falmer House’s iconic knapped flint walls commissioned by Sir Basil Spence.

No other material symbolises the history of human knowledge like flint. The first flint tools were made about 2.3 million years ago and are among the oldest manufactured objects. In 1996-7, archaeological evidence of a large Mesolithic flint-working site was found just north of Sussex’s campus at Streat. Then in 2008-9, excavations on the site of the Amex Stadium uncovered a Mesolithic camp that produced flint tools on an unmatched scale in East Sussex.

These archaeological finds and studies reveal how the once forested Sussex landscape was shaped by the clearance of wood pastures using flint axes. The ancient bucolic landscape in between the Weald and South Downs was inspiration for Sir Basil Spence and Dame Sylvia Crowe when they conceived the campus architecture in the early 1960s. So, too, was the adjoining 18th-century landscape park at Stanmer where the church, farmhouse, village houses and wellhouse all have flint walls.

Spence’s use of traditional Sussex flint walling was most inspired by a ruined, charming old barn on the rural 232-acre site, which was known as Forty Acre Tenant Laine before the construction of the University began. The barn had wood-boarded walls, flint and red-brick gables and a tiled roof. All these local Sussex materials inspired Spence’s use of dark flint, pale concrete, woodgrain patterning, rich red brick and large plate-glass windows in the architecture of Falmer House, the first building he designed for the new University from 1959-62.

The main staircase of Falmer House, inside and out, is beautifully faced with knapped flint. Spence placed the dark flint panels on the shadowy north façade to draw the eye upwards to the silhouette of the V-shaped concrete form visible from the Library Square. Textures and colours of raw building materials were used as subtle surface motifs, such as the woodgrain patterning on the bare concrete vaults, the infilled walls of red brick and the large, knapped flints in twelve pre-cast panels.

“Spence placed the dark flint panels on the shadowy north façade to draw the eye upwards to the silhouette of the V-shaped concrete form visible from the Library Square.”

”

In 1962, a journalist from *Concrete Quarterly* visited the building site of Falmer House. The article effused over “the beauty of a concrete skeleton” and praised Spence’s use of “natural finishes” in the architectural design. The journalist wrote: “The hub of the accommodation is the great staircase with its... large, knapped flints in twelve pre-cast panels. This treatment echoes the fine old tradition of Sussex flint walling of the district and contrasts powerfully with the smooth concrete vaults.”

The article went on to describe how 20 tons of flints, quarried from the North Downs in Surrey, were supplied to the site. The knapping revealed the dark, glassy centres of the stones that were “placed face down on a layer of sand in wooden moulds.”

Sussex vernacular architecture has its own language for the types of flint and knapping practices used historically in local buildings. For example, the irregular joints between the flints are called ‘snail-creeps’. The flintknapping on Falmer House is an exemplary work of architectural design that combines painstaking craft and skilled artistry. The large, evenly sized and uniformly dark flints are laid closely together with only the slenderest of snail-creeps separating them. If you run your fingertips across the beautifully textured, cold surface, it feels almost perfectly flat. Throughout the day, the slow movement of sunlight across the glassy north-facing wall on Library Square is beguilingly beautiful.

Falmer House’s flints came from the Hall family’s quarry in Coulsdon, south of London, which closed in 1961. *Concrete Quarterly* included a photograph of an unknown flintknapper at work on the building site. He is unrecognisable in his hard hat, goggles and facemask, but because he was credited by Spence, we know he was a Polish refugee who had learnt the skilled art of flintknapping in the Soviet Gulag.

Spence commented: “Our knapped flint panels were also made here and though this craft had been a thriving one in the district, the contractors found it best to enlist the services of a Pole who learnt his craft in a Soviet labour camp. After his escape to freedom, he continued to break stones, but at least at Sussex he was well paid!”

We can only imagine the flintknapper’s personal odyssey from Poland to Sussex. The University has a long and radical tradition of supporting those seeking sanctuary and, in 2020, was awarded the status of an official University of Sanctuary. Knowing that a Polish refugee knapped the traditional Sussex flint wall of Falmer House makes it poignant and profound. His flint wall stands as a monument of just how much émigrés have helped to build Britain.

“If you run your fingertips across the beautifully textured, cold surface, it feels almost perfectly flat.”



ABOVE: Inside Falmer House stairwell.
LEFT: Flint panels grace the exterior of Falmer House.

to campus

Get up close to the rich textures of flint in our digital edition of *Falmer* at www.sussex.ac.uk/falmer



Consciousness research is already
changing our understanding of human
experience, both in society at large
and to each of us individually.
The ability to experience the world –
and the self – is the everyday miracle
that brings meaning to our brief
moments in the light of existence.



PROFESSOR ANIL SETH (INFORMATICS 1995)
WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?
PAGES 28-31



UNIVERSITY
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