EDUCATION & THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The University recognises the academic potential of students as a resource precious to the individuals concerned, to their communities and to society at large. Its extensive investment in teaching and learning facilities, in training of staff, in widening participation and in technological innovation reflects the centrality to the University’s mission of helping every student to fulfil his or her potential.

The University’s priorities in this area are to:

- attract and retain academically gifted and highly motivated students from a wide range of backgrounds, creating a diverse and international University community;
- provide an education of the highest quality that is research-led and focused on the needs and expectations of our students;
- ensure students have a fulfilling, demanding and intellectually stimulating experience while at University, that prepares them for employment and worldwide opportunities when they leave;
- provide effective and enabling educational leadership and structures that support educational enhancement;
- ensure that learning takes place within a high-quality environment that enables both students and staff to achieve their full academic potential.

Audit and survey: grounds for confidence

The results of an institutional audit of the University by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in April 2009 expressed ‘confidence’ in Bristol’s academic standards and in the value of a Bristol degree. It was also encouraging to note that some departments improved their National Student Survey scores over the past year. The Education Support Unit, along with other divisions of Support Services, is committed to working with academic departments and the Students’ Union to ensure that the student experience at Bristol is as good as it can be within the resources available.

Student residences

In 2008/09, the University continued to develop its residential strategy. This is aimed at ensuring that halls of residence and other University homes offer students a choice of high-quality, affordable places to live with good facilities for living and learning, better transport links and improved safety and security. The strategy is not only about prioritising further capital investments in the residential estate, necessary though these will be; it is also about how to achieve residential communities that work for students – communities that support students’ education as well as their social and welfare needs. Over the past year there has been widespread consultation and debate about these and related issues. The emerging strategy will be far stronger as a result.

Master’s degree in Deathhood Studies – another first for Bristol

The University’s Centre for Deaf Studies has launched the world’s first Master’s degree in Deathhood Studies, only five years after the Centre’s Dr Paddy Ladd and colleagues introduced the Deathhood concept (now adopted globally) to reflect the enormous changes in Deaf and hearing communities over the past 30 years. The course includes units on Deaf history, sign language literature and folklore, sign linguistics and Deaf culture.

Bristol to offer 75 new Humanities studentships

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) has awarded the University £2.6 million to support postgraduate studentships in Arts and in Social Sciences and Law. The funds, which will come to Bristol under the AHRC’s new Block Grant Partnership scheme, will provide 75 studentships over the next five years.

Funding professionals to train at Bristol

Bristol is one of 12 UK universities to offer a new, three-year graduate trainee programme aimed at increasing the number of fundraising professionals working in higher education. The programme is funded by CASE (Council for Advancement and Support of Education) Europe and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Widening participation

The Widening Participation Office exists to encourage and support people who have the ability, motivation and potential to thrive at university, but who come from groups that are currently under-represented in higher education. These include people from certain minority ethnic groups, those with disabilities, ‘mature’ candidates (people over the age of 25) and those from families who have little or no history of going to university.

The Office works in partnership with schools, other higher education institutions, Connexions, the Learning and Skills Council, the government’s Aimhigher programme, further education colleges and the voluntary and community sector to raise aspirations and attainment with a view to increasing the numbers of people from under-represented groups attending and succeeding at university. The Office’s busy programme includes tutor days and residential summer schools to give young people an insight into university life; school visits and mentoring of pupils by student volunteers; and specialist masterclasses to help raise pupils’ attainment in specific subjects.

In 2008/09, widening participation events included:

- Aimhigher-funded activities involving 57 local schools and colleges, during which the University worked with around 5,000 young people and 1,500 parents;
- outreach work targeted at mature students, young people and their parents, teachers and careers advisers, totalling some 9,000 people via schemes such as Access to Bristol, the Sutton Trust and higher education summer schools, and events in schools and colleges throughout the region.
- The profile of the student body has proved resistant to change, with the proportion of students from low-participation areas of the country improving.
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The moral, spiritual and personal welfare of students is a concern shared throughout the network of student support services, which includes the Student Counselling Service and the Multifaith Chaplaincy.

The Student Counselling Service is staffed by a team of professionally trained and widely experienced counsellors accustomed to helping people from many backgrounds and cultures. Counselling is available free to all students at the University, including on-site counselling at Langford. In response to an escalation in the number of students requesting counselling in 2008/09, the Service extended its evening opening hours and appointed a new receptionist. It also joined forces with the Staff Counselling Service and the Access Unit to provide workshops on managing students in distress and crisis, available to all sectors of the University.

The Multifaith Chaplaincy maintains an active role in the spiritual and social welfare of the University community. There are currently 17 University chaplains, all appointed by faith communities in Bristol, and the Multifaith Chaplaincy Centre offers a range of quiet rooms and social spaces. In 2008/09, events organised by the Multifaith Chaplaincy included a lecture by Mona Siddiqua, Professor of Islamic Studies and Public Understanding at Glasgow University, on Christian-Muslim relations (arranged as part of the University’s centenary lecture series) and the annual thanksgiving service for those who bequeath their bodies to the Department of Anatomy.

Pastoral care: Student Counselling Service and the Multifaith Chaplaincy

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Teaching prizes
In January, the University held its annual Learning and Teaching Exhibition and awarded prizes to members of academic and support staff across the University in recognition of their efforts in supporting the student learning experience. The event, organised by the Education Support Unit, included an exhibition of innovative learning and teaching practice from across the faculties, short talks on recent developments in learning and teaching, and a keynote presentation by Dr Nick Harris, a British Council-appointed UK Bologna Expert, on the implications of the Bologna Process for higher education.

During the evening, the 2008 awards were presented to the following people:

Teaching and Learning Prizes
Awarded to members of staff who show the characteristics of an excellent teacher.

- Tricha Passes
  Department of History of Art

- Dr Martin Lings
  Department of Civil Engineering

- Dr Lynda Moore
  Department of Clinical Veterinary Science

- Dr Angela Hague
  Department of Oral and Dental Science

- Dr Andrew Blythe
  Community-based Medicine

- Dr Sean Collins
  Department of Mathematics

- Dr Tony Hoare
  School of Geographical Sciences

- Elisabeth Lazarus
  Graduate School of Education

Rising Star Awards
For staff who have been teaching in higher education for less than five years and who show excellent potential through the quality of analysis and practice in teaching.

- Dr Emma Hornby
  Department of Music

- Dr David Drury
  Electrical and Electronic Engineering

- Dr Emma Robinson
  Department of Physiology and Pharmacology

- Dr Andy Salmon
  Clinical Science at North Bristol

- Dr David Leslie
  Department of Mathematics

- Dr Jo Haynes
  Department of Sociology

- Dr Emma Hornby
  Department of Music

Awards Recognising Support for Teaching and Learning
Recognising outstanding contributions to education by members of support staff.

- Paula Coonerty
  Arts Faculty Office

- Dr Evan Jones
  Department of Historical Studies

- Anne Thorpe, Gina Stuart, Martin Baker and Phil Wade
  Faculty of Engineering

- Ruth Batterham
  Department of Biochemistry

- Deborah Hawkins
  Department of Social Medicine

- Melanie Stodell
  Community-based Medicine

- Dr Tim Obey and Dr Tom Podesta
  Chemistry

- Janet Woolway-Allen
  Department of Experimental Psychology

- Kes O’Donnell
  Social Sciences and Law Faculty Office

Engagement Awards
Recognising staff whose work in public engagement has been exceptional and/or innovative.

- Lois Bibbings (School of Law) and the Widening Participation Office Meriton Law Enrichment programme

- Professor Jon Keating, Chrystal Chemiwchan and Azita Ghassemi (Department of Mathematics) Mathematical Ethnographies project

- Dr Caroline McKinnon
  (Department of Biochemistry) Science Alive! initiative in Biochemistry

- Dr Linda Sellou
  (School of Chemistry) Bristol ChemLabS outreach programme

- Tom Sperlinger
  (Department of English) BA in English Literature and Community Engagement programme

- Dr Martin Homer
  Department of Engineering Mathematics

- Dr Dominic O’Sullivan
  Department of Oral and Dental Science

- Dr Colin Western
  School of Chemistry

- Gervas Huxley
  Department of Economics

- Right: Postgraduates on the staircase inside the Wills Memorial Building
Further study 20.8%  
Work and further study 8.8%  
Voluntary/unpaid work 1.3%  
PhD student Hylke de Jong, has uncovered the earliest evidence of a nuclear family, dating back to the Stone Age. A burial in Germany contained a female, a male and two children, buried facing each other – an unusual practice in Neolithic culture.

Full-time paid work 53.4%  
Graduate destinations 2007

In response to these conditions, and to student concern, the Careers Service developed a sustainable portfolio of flagship services research, chemistry, mathematics, drama, mechanical engineering, economics, accounting and finance, aeronautical engineering and sports-related studies are among other research areas in which the University achieved particular distinction.

Research at Bristol includes much that is of public benefit. The University’s activity is engaged in the fullest sense: engaged with urgent issues such as disease, climate change, energy, social justice, natural resources and the welfare of the individual; engaged with the cultural life and history of nations and communities across the world; engaged with the future of technology and science and the development of innovations in medicine, nanotechnology, quantum cryptography, composite materials, stem-cell engineering and other emerging fields.

The University’s priorities in this area are to:

- be recognised globally for the quality of our research;
- create a positive research environment and infrastructure that will attract and retain the highest quality researchers and postgraduate students worldwide;
- develop our portfolio of flagship and high-impact research, working across and between disciplines to answer important societal questions and contribute to the social, political and environmental well-being of the region, the UK and the wider world;
- seek, manage and provide professional support for strategic relationships and alliances with key national and international partners – business and industry, the public sector, user communities, sponsors of research and policy-makers;
- play a leading intellectual role in enterprises, knowledge exchange and economic and social impact agendas, and continue to be a beacon of good practice and leader of innovation in the city and region;
- develop a sustainable portfolio of research informed by evidence-based leadership, management and administration and supported by high standards of governance.

Strong showing for Bristol in Research Assessment Exercise

The results of the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), an independent assessment of the quality of research in UK universities, confirmed the University of Bristol as a world leader in research. The RAE, a rigorous exercise carried out on behalf of the higher education funding bodies, helped the Higher Education Funding Council for England to determine how more than £1.5 billion in research funding would be allocated annually. Over 90 per cent of eligible staff at Bristol were included in the University’s RAE submission – thought to be one of the highest percentages in the sector.

Over 61 per cent of the research work assessed in 48 research fields at Bristol was awarded either the top 4* rating, defined as ‘world-leading’, or the 3* rating, classed as ‘internationally excellent’. The quality of Bristol’s research in geography emerged as first equal with Cambridge in the UK.

Epidemiology and public health, health services research, chemistry, mathematics, drama, mechanical engineering, economics, accounting and finance, aeronautical engineering and sports-related studies are among other research areas in which the University achieved particular distinction. Bristol’s faculties of Science and Engineering performed exceptionally well, but there were areas of outstanding research performance across all six faculties.

Taking into account the 2* rating – defined as ‘recognized internationally’ – as well as the 3* and 4* ones, nearly 93 per cent of research at Bristol was deemed to be of international standard.

Adapt stem-cell breakthroughs

Academics from Bristol played a key role in a breakthrough in stem-cell research that was announced in November 2008. Professor Anthony Hollander from the Department of Cellular and Molecular Medicine and Professor Martin Brismah from the University of Bristol were part of a pan-European team that achieved a breakthrough in tissue engineering using adult stem cells, leading to a life-saving transplant operation. A young woman’s diseased trachea was replaced by a length of cartilage grown from the patient’s own stem cells in Professor Berthois’s lab, and matured into cartilage cells using an adapted method originally devised by Professor Hollander for treating osteoarthritis. The operation was performed in June 2008 in Barcelona by Professor Paolo Macchiarini of the University of Barcelona.

The breakthrough gained global media coverage, and by April 2009 Professor Hollander had raised over £1.6 million to fund trials, including the first human study, of the pioneering ‘cell bandage’ technology, which aims to save thousands of patients from the type of knee surgery that currently leads to premature osteoarthritis. The trials will be conducted by the spin-out company he co-founded, Azellon Cell Therapeutics.

Found: world’s earliest nuclear family

An international team including Dr Alistair Pike, Head of Archaeology at Bristol, and PhD student Hylke de Jong, has uncovered the earliest evidence of a nuclear family, dating back to the Stone Age. A 4,600-year-old grave excavated at Eulau in Germany contained a female, a male and two children, buried facing each other – an unusual practice in Neolithic culture.