Human Rights
Advocacy in Action
Lives Well Lived:
A New Age of Animal Welfare

Alzheimer’s:
No Smoke Without Fire
Welcome
Welcome to Nonesuch. First, I would like to say a personal ‘thank you’ to all the alumni volunteers around the world, working with the Campaigns and Alumni Relations Office, who have done a truly fantastic job of organising events and bringing alumni together.

The Alumni Weekend 2012 from 6 to 8 July will showcase the ‘Best of Bristol’, both from the perspective of the University and the city, with a variety of lectures, lunches, dinners and tours. I am particularly looking forward to the Valedictory Lectures by Stephen Lansley (BSc 1972, BOS 1975, PhD 1978, MA 2005) and Bob Evans (PhD 1970) – both acclaimed teachers over many years who are now Emeritus professors. For a full weekend programme and booking details, visit bristol.ac.uk/alumni/events/reunion.

Second, as Bristol alumni and members of Convocation, this is the time of year for you to stand and vote are enclosed. Details of how to represent on Court, and to stand for membership of the Convocation Committee, are now Emeritus professors. For a full membership of the Convocation Committee, or as Chair of Convocation. Details of how to stand and vote are enclosed.

I sincerely look forward to seeing you at the Alumni Weekend and hope you will join Bristol’s rapidly growing LinkedIn alumni group around the world, working with the Office, who have a done a truly fantastic job of organising events and bringing alumni together.

Bill Ray
Chairman of Convocation, Bristol’s alumni association
alumni@bristol.ac.uk

Is Bristol the same university that it was when you were a student here?

In one particular aspect, the answer is surely both ‘no’ and ‘yes’. From this year, we decided to increase UK/EU undergraduate student numbers in 2012 (see pages 13-14). Our current plans will take us to around 21,000 students by 2015/16. Overall, the expansion is modest and Bristol will retain its relatively small size compared with other Russell Group universities.

Of course, the University has expanded in every decade of its life. In 1960, there were around 3,400 Bristol students; by 1980, there were 7,100, and by 2000, there were 15,700. Growth is, in fact, ‘business as usual’ for Bristol University.

To support our growth plans now, we are expanding teaching capacity in various subject areas, and investing in teaching and living spaces. This is because of our commitment to retaining the quality of the student experience, and our belief that groundbreaking research must underpin our teaching.

Such objectives are fundamental to what Bristol stands for, and we deviate from them at our peril. While the University may not, on the surface, be exactly the same now as when you studied here, its core value of excellence is, and always will, remain the same.

Bill Ray
Chairman of Convocation, Bristol’s alumni association

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Hammer brought back from the dead

Simon Oakes (BA 1980), Vice-Chairman of Exclusive Media, and President and CEO of Hammer production company, has brought Hammer films back on to our screens with The Woman in Black.

‘We were in our hotel of hearts thought we’d have that phenomenal opening, it just caught fire. I hope this means Hammer is back. There is something in the gothic horror theme that really speaks to the heart of Hammer. It’s somehow pricked people’s imagination.’

Hammer has announced that its next supernatural thriller, The Quiet Ones, is moving into production and will be presented at the upcoming European Film Market.

The new graze.com craze

Enterprise

Edd Read (MEng 2007) is co-founder of the company graze.com, a new snackbox delivery company that is becoming a huge success in offices across the country.

Graze delivers healthy, natural food by post. Only three years old, the company has been going from strength to strength.

Marketing Week magazine reported ‘Graze.com plans to ramp up its advertising and expand its marketing department this year.’

Read said: ‘We’ve created a world-class innovation in web-ordering and delivery. By combining state-of-the-art technology and bespoke web-based systems, custom building our own robotic food posting facility and sourcing the best ingredients in the world, we’re working hard towards our goal of becoming the most innovative food company in the world.’

Marathon in honour of Registrar’s cancer battle

Dr Jonathan Nicholls (BA 1978) ran the London Marathon in honour of Dr Tony Rich, the University of Bristol’s recently retired Registrar, who is battling cancer.

Dr Jonathan Nicholls (BA 1978), who is Cambridge University’s Registrar, has raised over £16,000 in sponsorship for the University’s Cancer Research Fund, which supports vital research into cancer prevention and treatment.

Dr Rich started work as Registrar and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Bristol at the end of the 2007/08 academic year but had to retire due to ill health.

Nicholls said: ‘I completed the marathon in four hours and 49 minutes. My friendship with Tony (whom I was able to greet on Tower Bridge where he was watching with members of his family) definitely inspired me, as did my debt to the University of Bristol. We are all truly grateful for the large sum that has been raised already.’

If you would like to support the Cancer Research Fund, please visit our Centenary Campaign website, bristol.ac.uk/centenarycampaign.

Alumni in the news

Dr Jonathan Nicholls (BA 1978) ran the London Marathon in honour of Dr Tony Rich, the University of Bristol’s recently retired Registrar, who is battling cancer. Nicholls said: ‘I completed the marathon in four hours and 49 minutes. My friendship with Tony (whom I was able to greet on Tower Bridge where he was watching with members of his family) definitely inspired me, as did my debt to the University of Bristol. We are all truly grateful for the large sum that has been raised already.’

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Regulars

The plug

New books

‘Ubusing’ Culture: Alfred Jarry’s Subversive Poetics in the Almanachs du Père Ubu by Marieke Dubbelboer (Legenda). Paradox and provocazion were essential features of the work of Alfred Jarry, not least in the experimental and satirical Almanachs du Père Ubu. Dr Marieke Dubbelboer, Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of French, examines key characteristics of Jarry’s poetics through an analysis of the Almanachs and addresses their role within European avant-garde.

Examining the Visual in Sport edited by Mike Huggins and Mike O’Mahony (Routledge). This volume, jointly edited by Dr Mike O’Mahony of Bristol’s History of Art Department and Professor Mike Huggins from the University of Cumbria, brings together an international array of art historians, visual culture specialists and sport historians and examines the importance of visual culture as a vital research resource for understanding sport as a cultural phenomenon in the modern era.

‘Ubusing’ Culture...
The leaders of today

Ben Emmerson QC (LLB 1985) has been selected as the United Nations’ special rapporteur on counter-terrorism and human rights. Quoted in The Guardian, Emmerson said: ‘Far too often international law and human rights standards are seen as incompatible with effective counter-terrorism. The reverse is true.

Sarah Glennie (BA 1992) has been appointed Director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA). Glennie said: ‘IMMA makes a vibrant and valuable contribution to contemporary Irish society and I am truly honoured to be given the opportunity to lead this great institution into the next important phase of its development.’

Alastair Paterson (MEng 2004) is CEO of Digital Shadows, Ltd., a cyber security innovator, which announced its partnership with leading information security provider, Activity. The partnership will provide groundbreaking service to Digital Shadows’ clients, keeping organisations safe from cyber attacks.

Christian Rütz (LLM 2003) has been appointed a Civil Court Judge by the Land Nordrhein-Westfalen, working at the higher regional court of Krefeld (Lower Rhine).

Will Dean gets tough

Business

Will Dean (BSc 2003), Chief Executive of Tough Mudder, is one of Crain’s New York Business.com’s ‘40 under 40’.

From a list of over 500 nominees worldwide, Will Dean has been selected as one of the ‘40 under 40’ for 2012 for having achieved success in business before turning 40. Tough Mudder is an adventure challenge series which includes 12 mile-long obstacle courses designed by the Special Forces to test all round strength, stamina, mental grit and camaraderie. These events can include crawling under barbed wire, plunging into icy water, climbing through flames and getting shocked by 10,000 volts of electricity. Tough Mudder makes more than $2 million in revenues in its first year and about $25 million in its second. Now in its third year, it is expanding into Europe, South Africa, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

In an interview with Crain’s New York Business.com, Dean said: ‘It’s not like saying, “Can I run a hundred miles?” It’s, “Do I have it mentally?”’. Dean worked in counter-terrorism for the British government for five years and had to complete United Kingdom Special Forces training. It was used to measure his ‘mental grit’ as opposed to pure physical fitness and later became the inspiration for Tough Mudder.

Chris Salmon’s autograph goes national

Finance

Chris Salmon (BSc 1990), Executive Director, Banking and Chief Cashier for the Bank of England, has had his signature featured on the new £50 note, without which the bank-note would not be legal tender.

Before Salmon was appointed to his current role in June 2012, he ran the Bank’s Sterling Markets Division for two years with responsibility for the implementation of the Bank’s monetary and financial stability market operations, including the Quantitative Easing programme.

In The Telegraph, Salmon said that he wanted the bank-notes to be “instantly recognisable and hard to copy”. Since being appointed Executive Director, Banking and Chief Cashier, he has overseen operations of the new £50 note, which has been phased in across the country. It carries eight significant updates in security features for cash users, compared with the five of its predecessor.

Salmon said to Nonesuch: ‘A huge amount of work goes into the launch of a new bank-note, so it was a testament to all involved that the launch of the new £50 in November went so smoothly.’

Bringing War Horse to life

Film

The Oscar winning film War Horse relied heavily on the computer-generated visual effects expertise of Ben Morris (BEng 1993). Interviewed by the Evening Post, Morris said: ‘Where special effects were unavoidable I was determined to make it so life-like that nobody would know it was CGI.

‘Where special effects were unavoidable I was determined to make it so life-like that nobody would know it was CGI.

In pictures

Snapshots

Life & work at Bristol
Dementia affects one in 14 people over the age of 65. As the population ages, this number is likely to increase. Professor Seth Love and Dr Pat Kehoe, co-directors of the Dementia Research Group in the School of Clinical Sciences, are among those in the forefront of research into the abnormalities of the brain in this disease, and new options for its treatment and prevention.
Dementia is still poorly understood and shockingly underfunded

By Hilary Brown

F or every dementia scientist, there are more than six cancer researchers. And yet more than 465,000 people in the UK have Alzheimer’s disease, costing the economy more than £23 billion and causing considerable human suffering.

There is currently no cure for Alzheimer’s. The treatments available only alleviate some symptoms for a limited period — they target memory loss by attempting to correct chemical imbalances in the brain, but don’t tackle the underlying causes of the disease. There is huge pressure on scientists to deliver new drugs, but dementia is still poorly understood and research remains shockingly underfunded.

So argues Alzheimer’s Research UK, the country’s leading dementia research charity, in its recent report, Defeating Dementia. It states that despite recent initiatives from government and other research funders, the field is dominated by research into cancer and heart disease, neither of which poses the same degree of risk to society and the economy as Alzheimer’s.

The enemy within

Lack of funding is an issue, says Seth Love, Professor of Neuropathology, but that’s not the only reason why dementia research is trailing in the field. It was over a century ago that German neurologist Dr Alois Alzheimer first described the symptoms of the disease that bear his name, but for many years clinicians didn’t regard dementia as a disease — it was just part of getting old. ‘It wasn’t until the 1950s and 1960s that scientists began to realise that the changes in the brains of people with dementia were not an inevitable consequence of ageing: that some people got to 100 without becoming demented, and that those who did develop dementia had a disease,’ explains Love.

There’s also the problem of accessibility to tissue for research purposes. ‘Cancer research has progressed so quickly because in general it’s relatively easy to remove tumours from living patients and extract fresh cells to study. That’s just not the case with brain diseases like dementia,’ says Love. ‘The Human Tissue Act quite rightly regulates the use of post-mortem human tissue, but this means that organ donation is no longer an option. The effects of dementia on the brain is complex and multifaceted; scientists need access to tissues from people of different ages and stages of the disease. There’s a lot of research that could be done that’s currently not happening due to the lack of access to brain tissues.’

A different take

Bristol’s Dementia Research Group brings together scientists with varied but complementary skills to study some of these contributory factors from different angles. Its research programme focuses on a number of interrelated themes using molecular, genetic, biochemical and neurophysiological approaches to study the underlying mechanisms that cause dementia.

The group has brought fresh perspectives to dementia research in two areas in particular. The first, and the focus of Love’s research, relates to the role of plaques – large clumps of a protein known as Aβ (Aβ) that kill off brain cells. There is much evidence to support the view that the accumulation of Aβ and the secondary damage this causes to brain tissue is central to the development of Alzheimer’s. But while most research has targeted the reasons for Aβ production, Love’s focus is on the enzymes that attempt to break it down — and the complications that can result.

‘All accumulation coincides with an increase in the activity of enzymes that act to remove the protein and protect the brain from its harmful effects,’ says Love. ‘One of the things we’ve shown is that this activity adversely affects other systems, such as the renin-angiotensin and endothelin pathways that regulate blood pressure, and the opening up and closing down of blood vessels in the brain.’

Abnormal signals produced by this pathway contribute to a number of other devastating effects seen in brains of people with Alzheimer’s. These include lowered blood circulation in the brain, damage to blood vessels, higher levels of brain inflammation and increased brain cell death due to reduced oxygen supply. ‘You then have the potential for a vicious cycle, because Aβ production increases when the brain cells are deprived of oxygen,’ says Love.

Fire-fighting

Looking at ways to repair damage caused to the vascular system in dementia, and improve blood supply to the brain, is where Kehoe comes in. One of his main areas of research is investigating the relationship between high blood pressure and the development of dementia in later life, and, in particular, the links between the renin-angiotensin system and Alzheimer’s.

His research has led him to experts Professor Richard Martin (PhD 2005) and Yoar Ben-Silho in the School of Social and Community Medicine. The team has found that people with hypertension, and the angiotensin pathway.

A wealth of information

Brain bank

The Dementia Research Group has access to a unique resource: a collection of more than 850 brains, accumulated over nearly 30 years.

The South West Dementia Brain Bank (SWDBB) was established by Gordon Wilcock, former Professor of Care of the Elderly and founder of the Dementia Research Institute, in 1990 with the aim of providing material for dementia-related research. SWDBB is part of the Brains for Dementia Research network, a formal network of five brain banks. It aims to monitor people both with and without memory impairment until they die and donate their brain. This enables researchers to look more specifically at brain changes in relation to particular manifestations of dementia.

SWDBB is funded by grants from a number of sources including Alzheimer’s Research UK, Alzheimer’s Society, the Dementia and Neurodegenerative Diseases Research Network, Western Comprehensive Local Research Network and BRAiCE (which also contributes to the research). The resource was set up in 1990 to establish a research bank for the main brain changes that come about in dementia patients. This enables researchers to look at the effects of dementia on the brain and be sure that the brain changes are not due to things like high blood pressure and the angiotensin pathway.

Defeating Dementia

Lack of funding

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From Bristol to the 2012 Olympic Games

Freya Sterling interviews Jayne Pearce-McMenamin (BA 1986), Head of Press Operations for the Olympic Games 2012

I discovered my enjoyment for the organising aspect of sport during my time at Bristol University. Right from the get-go I had the honour of being a captain of a variety of teams: basketball, tennis and netball. I also relished signing friends into intra-mural sport. I particularly enjoyed team sports because they bring down barriers and encourage people to work together.

I went on to become President of the Athletics Union. I wanted some practical experience and to give something back to Bristol. Organising mini-buses and kit management meetings and so forth was essentially a microcosm of the jobs I was to do later in my career, and a language degree at Bristol gave me a unique competitive edge when applying for jobs.

My BA Honours degree in French and German was a major contributing factor in securing future roles, including my role as Press Manager of the Bordeaux Venue of the IAAF World Athletics Championships in Paris. In fact, my first major role at the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) was translating press clippings.

As Head of Press Operations for the Olympic Games 2012, I aim to provide great working facilities for the press. In the next couple of months, we will be providing the 5,800 press and media; Centre, 1,500 biographies of athletes and horses, venue media centres, a huge central Main Press Centre in June and the Games themselves in July. Staff and volunteers will be there to assist the press: answering questions, managing photographer positions, running Venue Media Centres and much more. Most of the team are volunteers, and I want to make sure that everybody has a fulfilling, worthwhile experience.

This is the seventh Olympic Games I’ve been part of, but the London Games are on a scale like no other. The 2012 Olympics will be the experience of a lifetime and will be great for our country. There’s so much going on, whether you’re interested in sport or not. It’s a fabulous opportunity and a wonderful thing to happen in our backyard, in our lifetime. I’m thrilled and honoured to be part of it.

Our biggest challenge for the Olympics will be going from a core team of 36 to 3,000, who will be implementing press operations on the ground. We have been training our staff at over 40 test events in various venues across the country, as well as holding classroom exercises ready for the opening of the Main Press Centre in June and the Games themselves in July. Staff and volunteers will be there to assist the press: answering questions, managing photographer positions, running Venue Media Centres and much more. Most of the team are volunteers, and I want to make sure that everybody has a fulfilling, worthwhile experience.

The 2012 Olympics will be great for our country and I’m thrilled to be part of it.
There are still many questions to be answered about the first cyanobacteria to colonise the oceans. Since they would have used carbon dioxide to photosynthesise, this would have had major effects on global nutrient cycles and the climate of the early Earth. Indeed, the geological record shows major climatic events such as global Earth glaciations following the rise in atmospheric oxygen. So how are these events linked? And what role do microorganisms play in regulating the global environment?

The parental era

Some chains of cause and effect are much easier to trace. Sanchez-Baracaldo had already changed research fields after moving to Bristol from Berkeley; then, having gained a foothold in phylogenetics, she entered another period of change with the birth of her first child.

That brings an environment all its own round-the-clock duties, deep depression, sickness, baby talk... hardly conditions in which academic-level work can thrive. 'I wanted to take a year off with each baby, and I don’t regret it for a moment,' she says. But it came at a cost. After her second child, born 18 months after the first, she left science to concentrate on parenthood.

'After so long away from science, you lose confidence,' she says. 'Your field moves on, your peers move up, new techniques come along. The statistics show how many women leave science after having a baby. And I wonder if some of them regret having left.'

Strictly speaking, she never left science entirely. 'During maternity leave I explored different ideas,' she says. 'I wanted to do something worthwhile for society.' In 2007-08, she advised the Ministry of Environment in her native Colombia on the effects of climate change on high-altitude ecosystems in the Andes. 'The higher temperatures put these ecosystems at greater risk, and they’ll eventually disappear. That work sparked my interest in climate change.' She also collaborated on a paper with a colleague in the States, an experience she recalls with mixed feelings. 'That was hard — she would email me drafts, but I was totally sleep-deprived, it felt like an achievement if I managed anything beyond keeping my children happy, clean and fed.'

At the end of her second maternity leave she worked part-time in Biology, running a training programme for PhD students. But then several people told me there were funding opportunities for women who had left science for caring responsibilities, and I decided to look into it. I was convinced there was no chance — I’d packed away all my notebooks... It may be easy to say now, but the chances are that the scientist who, as a child in Colombia, loved “watching all the nature documentaries and reading science encyclopedias” would probably have found a way of getting back to something that is clearly her passion.

The turning point came when she heard about the Dorothy Jackson Trust, a charity that helps scientists, engineers and technologists to re-enter their field after a career break for family, caring or health reasons. She sent them her CV and a personal statement, was invited to apply, and was accepted. And thus began her own Great Oxygenation Event.

The fellowship brings high expectations and I want to fulfill them

‘It was great to have the Trust tell me that I had a great CV and great publications,’ says Sanchez-Baracaldo. ‘They were saying “We believe in you”, and that’s all it takes to spur you on.’ She started contacting people at Bristol, beginning with Professor Andy Ridgwell in the School of Geographical Sciences, who studies climate change. ‘He liked the work I’d done, and agreed to be my mentor. He was so enthusiastic, I really felt I was on to something good.’ Professor Alastair Hetherington in Biological Sciences agreed to be a second mentor.

She then wrote a proposal for a project — studying how events such as the evolution of cyanobacteria influenced the global environment and past climatic events — and applied to the Royal Society for a Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship, which is designed for excellent scientists in the UK at an early stage of their career who require a flexible working pattern due to personal circumstances such as parenting or caring responsibilities or health issues.

‘Applications to the Royal Society have a tiny success rate,’ she says. ‘I worked so hard on it; as soon as my baby was asleep, I was at the computer.’ But it paid off: in 2011 she was awarded a prestigious Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship, with five years’ funding.

Labs and laundry

‘It’s still a challenge,’ says Sanchez-Baracaldo. ‘The Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship brings with it high expectations, and of course I want to fulfill them. But if I didn’t love challenges, I probably wouldn’t have got the Fellowship in the first place. When I was doing my PhD at Berkeley, we worked such long hours in the lab that doing laundry felt like a holiday. Laundry is still one of my favourite chores.’

But, as with the early Earth’s atmosphere, it’s all about finding the right balance. She says. ‘for excellent scientists in the UK at an early stage of their career who require a flexible working pattern due to personal circumstances such as parenting or caring responsibilities or health issues. Applications to the Royal Society have a tiny success rate,’ she says. ‘I worked so hard on it; as soon as my baby was asleep, I was at the computer.’ But it paid off: in 2011 she was awarded a prestigious Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship, with five years’ funding.

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‘It’s still a challenge,’ says Sanchez-Baracaldo. ‘The Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship brings with it high expectations, and of course I want to fulfill them. But if I didn’t love challenges, I probably wouldn’t have got the Fellowship in the first place. When I was doing my PhD at Berkeley, we worked such long hours in the lab that doing laundry felt like a holiday. Laundry is still one of my favourite chores.’

But, as with the early Earth’s atmosphere, it’s all about finding the right balance. She says. ‘for excellent scientists in the UK at an early stage of their career who require a flexible working pattern due to personal circumstances such as parenting or caring responsibilities or health issues. Applications to the Royal Society have a tiny success rate,’ she says. ‘I worked so hard on it; as soon as my baby was asleep, I was at the computer.’ But it paid off: in 2011 she was awarded a prestigious Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship, with five years’ funding.

Deep breaths

‘It was great to have the Trust tell me that I had a great CV and great publications,’ says Sanchez-Baracaldo. ‘They were saying “We believe in you”, and that’s all it takes to spur you on.’ She started contacting people at Bristol, beginning with Professor Andy Ridgwell in the School of Geographical Sciences, who studies climate change. ‘He liked the work I’d done, and agreed to be my mentor. He was so enthusiastic, I really felt I was on to something good.’ Professor Alastair Hetherington in Biological Sciences agreed to be a second mentor.

She then wrote a proposal for a project — studying how events such as the evolution of cyanobacteria influenced the global environment and past climatic events — and applied to the Royal Society for a Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship, which is designed for excellent scientists in the UK at an early stage of their career who require a flexible working pattern due to personal circumstances such as parenting or caring responsibilities or health issues.

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Growth as usual

By Nick Lieven

In June last year, the government announced a partial deregulation of home (UK and EU) student numbers. Historically, home and EU student numbers were strictly controlled by government but from the 2012 intake, the cap on the number of students that universities can enrol that achieve A-Level grades of AAB and above has been lifted. This is a significant milestone in terms of a deregulation, albeit partial, of what has been historically a highly regulated environment.

Of course, UK higher education was already in the midst of a dynamic structural change; the new coalition government had already announced a significant increase in the tuition fee cap to £9,000. In response to that change, universities found themselves in the spotlight as students across the country – including those in Bristol – took to the streets in protest.

The news about the deregulation of AAB+ student numbers has not dominated education headlines in the same way, yet we believe that it is likely to have an even more pronounced impact on the sector than the fee increase. Universities with lower proportions of AAB+ students may face challenges in recruiting sufficient students, whereas universities like Bristol, where demand for places from outstanding candidates outstrips availability, have a new opportunity to consider increasing educational provision for some of the UK’s brightest students.

Bristol is taking that opportunity. We plan to increase our current undergraduate intake from around 3,300 per annum, to around 3,900. The fundamental questions are, of course: Why grow? And what does growth mean for Bristol?

Why grow?

Growth is not a new concept for universities, or for Bristol. Since the 1960s the number of UK universities has grown, and student numbers have risen at almost every university in the country. In 1991 there were around 990,000 undergraduates in UK universities; in 2011 there were 1.9 million undergraduates.

IN 2011 THERE WERE 1.9 MILLION UNDERGRADUATES

Bristol University itself grew dramatically in the 1960s and 1990s, with slower but still constant growth in the 70s and 80s (see panel on right). In fact, growth has been integral to Bristol’s success and achievement throughout its life. From the addition of a Drama Department (the UK’s first as the 1980s), to the very recent example of accreditation of the BSc in Biochemistry with a Year in Industry course, Bristol’s undergraduate degree offerings have expanded and developed as the world has evolved. Growth enables us to embrace new and emerging disciplines with rigor.

Now, an increase will enable us to expand departments where there is overwhelming demand for places, and to add key academic staff to others. For instance, in English – one of our most intellectually diverse disciplines – we have the opportunity to provide a broader range of intellectual challenges. Our planned growth will provide sufficient resource to enable us to recruit into new areas such as Contemporary Literature, a topic in the discipline where there is strong student interest. It’s a tight balancing act, but we feel that Bristol will succeed as long as we ensure that our growth is driven by our strategic imperatives to provide a positive – and improved – student experience, underpinned by our commitment to provide a rigorous scholarly education.

GROWTH ENABLES US TO EMBRACE NEW AND EMERGING DISCIPLINES

Growth provides another important opportunity for Bristol, in terms of perception. Undergraduate places at Bristol are among the most highly sought after in the country. In recent years, restricted course numbers mean we’ve had to turn down many well-qualified applicants; this has often led to accusations of bias on our part towards one particular student type or another. Nothing is further from the truth, but perception is everything; with tens of thousands of AAB+ students on our books, many talented students heard ‘no’ when they applied to Bristol in the past.

We believe that by expanding student numbers in high-demand subjects, we now have an opportunity to say ‘yes’ to some more of the best students in the country and EU.

The university landscape

Importantly, we are not the only university to be increasing its home undergraduate student intake. The education platform has shifted quickly and we can be sure that other universities will be competing aggressively for the same small pool of highly talented students. In this new environment, we have to ensure that students know about Bristol and its opportunities, and come to us first.

With this in mind, last autumn Bristol developed a campaign of targeted advertisements in newspapers, magazines and train stations. The ad (see below) used iconic Bristol images (Brunel’s Clifton Suspension Bridge, hot-air balloons), and, with an eye on the mobile-phone-using student audience, incorporated QR codes so readers could instantly access web content about the University.

As I write this piece, our 2012 undergraduate student numbers are pretty much where they should be, but we are not complacent. The world of undergraduate student recruitment has changed radically. Anecdotal evidence suggests that top-tier universities who are receiving record numbers of offers from competitive universities; top-notch 2012 candidates may find themselves more spoilt for choice than their 2011 peers. Our hope is that Bristol’s great attractions, its research excellence, its commitment to high-quality teaching and scholarship, its friendly student environment and its fantastic city will inspire those who have many options to choose Bristol.

Our Vice-Chancellor has said, in his capacity as Chairman of Universities UK, that changes in student number regulation will ‘mean different things to each individual institution and those differences are not yet necessarily predictable’. It is inevitable that there will be unintended consequences, there always are in the midst of such change. We believe that Bristol is well positioned to make the most out of the opportunities before us.

Building our future

I have been delighted by Bristol’s capacity to embrace this opportunity for growth. The University’s decision to respond by growing student numbers was made quickly, mindful of the opportunities laid out above, but also with capacity questions in mind for us and for the city of Bristol as a whole.

In 2010 Bristol was the first university in the country to introduce a QR code campaign, with a mission to raise awareness of Bristol as an environment that inspires and challenges our students. We had hit the mark. Now we must continue to raise the bar, which is a wholly exciting challenge.

David Alder
Director of Communications and Marketing

Discover more campaign

The QR code campaign set out to raise awareness of Bristol in such a way as to reflect the excellence of our students and academics – it had to be clever and effortlessly excellent simultaneously. The response to the campaign, both in terms of increased web traffic to key University web pages, and wide acclaim from the advertising and marketing media, underlined that we had hit the mark. Now we must continue to raise the bar, which is a wholly exciting challenge.

David Alder
Director of Communications and Marketing
Introducing more students to the city, even phased over several years, is a significant undertaking. We have also had to ensure that our facilities can cope with the increase. Our commitment to house all UUK first-years who come from outside Bristol is one we are keen to preserve. The student residential experience is a part of our history and character.

In particular, with private providers, we have the capacity to meet our commitment for the next few years, as we plan and build new facilities on the Stoke Bishop site.

Our lecture theatres and study spaces will also grow, and we will improve the effectiveness of usage to maximise every lecture space we have in the most effective way for our students. The complexity of timetabling university teaching across our different undergraduate courses (many of which contain common elements) is quite astonishing, but our review of our current use gave us confidence that we can be more efficient with our existing assets. Within four years, as the numbers bed-in, we will need to provide some additional space, and we are planning for that now.

What happened when ... Bristol cavers struck it big

‘Romantic discovery of a vast and unknown cavern on Mendip,’ said the headline of an article in the Illustrated London News (ILN) in August 1941. The subhead went on: ‘An immense system of limestone caves and stalactites at Charterhouse-on-Mendip, 450 feet below surface, discovered by Bristol University students.’

The students concerned – Francis Goddard and Charles Barker – were members of the University’s Spelaeological Society, which had been investigating the subterranean formations beneath Black Down since the 1920s. Early in 1939, a group from the Society returned to the site of an earlier dig and began to excavate beneath a slab of rock where a stream had once disappeared underground. A draught from a fissure 25 feet below the surface suggested the existence of a cave, so the team used explosives to enlarge the crack until the two smallest members – Goddard and Barker – could fit through.

‘This … opened out into a series of chambers leading … some 300 ft, and amongst them were two grottoes of extraordinary beauty,’ continues the article, which goes on to describe stalactites in wildly varying forms – some with tree-like branches, others fused together into trunks. Work was slowed by the team’s wartime duties, and by more pressing excavations after the Society’s museum was destroyed in the first heavy bombing raid on Bristol. But they restarted the following spring to explore deeper into a complicated system of passages and chambers. They discovered the cave of dimensions exceeding anything else in the whole of Mendip, a roofed gorge [which] expands in its kistlinest part into a chamber approximately 120 ft high and 100 ft wide, the walls of which are draped with pure white curtains of stalactites.

Further discoveries were made: deep red stalagmites; stalactites that range like chimes when tapped; and an area of ground with a resonant crust on which water dripping from above created a distinctive rhythm that prompted the explorers to name the section Pumba Alley.

Access to the Grot-Cave (named after Goddard and Barker) is controlled by the Charterhouse Caving Company Ltd.

The walls are draped with pure white curtains of stalactites

Numbers

Botanic Garden

The 1.77-hectare Botanic Garden has been at its current site since 2005. It is the first university botanic garden to be created in the UK for nearly 40 years.

12,500 plants successfully moved to the current site

£15

from Bristol University College in 1892 to Adolf Lepine, Lecturer of Botany, to lay out a botanic garden

£89

additional funds raised by Lepine to build the garden

84 different sites in its history: the top of University Road, Hart Baker Garden (now the site of Senate House); Bracken Hill and now The Holmes

4,500 plant species arranged in four core collections

640m² area of glasshouse, divided into four distinct climatic zones

4,5000
Philosophers have debated the mental abilities of animals for centuries; today, animal welfare science is a burgeoning field. Studies by researchers such as Dr Becky Whay (PhD 1999) and Dr Claire Weeks (PhD 1981) in the Animal Welfare and Behaviour Group provide fundamental information about animals' perceptions, awareness and experiences in order to develop better welfare assessment methods and improve the conditions of livestock.
that their environment suitably protects their welfare.

into understanding how farm animals experience the world and them have become blurred. Researchers at Bristol's School of Veterinary Sciences are at the forefront of work without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing that they ‘eat machines; Aristotle thought that they were non-rational and created entirely for the use of humans. The 17th-century French theologian Nicolas Malebranche wrote that they ‘eat pain Has to Have a threshold, and the response to the stimulus should take place under the nociceptor threshold. If the animal has similar sensory pain mechanisms to people, then damaged tissue should have a lower nociceptor threshold, and the response to the stimulus should take place earlier. What's research shows that this is indeed the case: "There's evidence that at least locally to the site of the injury cows have increased responsiveness, which is classically indicative that the sensory mechanisms associated with pain and signal transmission are working in the way that we would expect them to."

If lameness is genuinely painful to the affected animals, there's a moral imperative to reduce its prevalence, in addition to the economic case for eradication. Sadly, eliminating lameness in cattle is far from straightforward—there are at least 15 different common causes, from the state of the farm's physical environment to the presence of infectious diseases.

What's work with farmers has helped identify which interventions are likely to be successful. Her team’s research has led to the introduction of a national lameness strategy, something that's helping to reduce incidences of lameness nationwide. As a result of this, the Veterinary School secured an award from the Vice-Chancellor for research impact.

Chickenopolis

Dairy cattle aren’t the only animals whose behaviour has come under scrutiny by researchers. Dr Claire Weeks, Senior Research Fellow in Animal Welfare, has had a varied career since reading Agricultural Science as an undergraduate: after specialising in Animal Sciences, she’s since worked on pigs, sheep, horses, real calves and poultry. She’s currently particularly interested in the welfare of laying hens and brother chickens. Broilers can spend their time in houses of up to 30,000 birds, making it very challenging to get a sense of how individual animals are faring at any given time.

“We have a very structured approach to measuring the way that animals are partitioning their time during the day,” says Weeks. “We look at the time they spend doing different things, the way they interact with one another, the objects they make use of, and so on. You can’t possibly look at 30,000 birds, you have to just look at an area of the house that’s well defined, and try to tease out the relevant features.”

“Hens, it turns out, are just as tricky to understand as cows, and they can respond unpredictably to changes in their environment. Getting it wrong can be costly, resulting in birds losing weight, becoming injured or pecking one another. ‘The mortality levels can be really frightening,’ says Weeks. ‘It can be more than 20 per cent of the birds dying during production, whereas on the very best farms, you’d be talking about one or two per cent.’

Weeks’ team has developed a whole range of management strategies aimed at improving chicken welfare. Where these are adopted by farmers, the results can be impressive. As Weeks says, ‘We’ve become successful at getting farmers to put our ideas into practice. This has a big impact on mortality, the birds have better quality plumage, better feather cover, and peck each other a lot less.’

Down on the farm

Work on animal welfare has a strong practical element. Researchers co-operate closely with commercial farms, both in terms of obtaining data for their work and in advising on best practice. The Veterinary School has played an active part in many welfare changes over recent years, resulting in vastly improved conditions for farm animals. Changing established practices isn’t always easy, even when supported by rigorous research. As Whay points out, “It’s a very difficult business to be in, with long, antisocial hours and challenging margins. Farmers can feel very demotivated, despite the fact that they often have highly qualified people working for them. One of the aims of our project work is to try to redress some of that empowerment balance,” says Whay. “We try to work by facilitating farmers to think about what they want to do on their farms. Rather than telling them what to do, we use their knowledge about their own farm. You have to trust that knowledge.”

This approach has led to a mutually beneficial relationship between academics and practitioners with plenty of practical benefits. ‘We’ve moved from the fundamental questions that we started with,’ says Whay. ‘From “Is cattle lameness painful?” to “What are we going to do about it?” and then “How do we work with farmers in order to make that happen?”’ It’s a prime example of abstract enquiry leading to practical changes, something of which Descartes, for all his mechanistic views on animals, would surely have approved.

By Chris Wraight

hat, if anything, do animals think about? Do they have an emotional life, one that might include happiness, stress or depression? Descartes thought that animals were little more than machines, Aristotle thought that they were non-rational and created entirely for the use of humans. The 17th-century French theologian Nicolas Malebranche wrote that they ‘eat without pleasure, cry without pain, grow without knowing that they desire nothing, fear nothing, know nothing.’

The more we learn about the inner lives of animals, though, the more the supposedly clear boundaries between us and them have become blurred. Researchers at Bristol’s School of Veterinary Sciences are at the forefront of work to understand how farm animals experience the world around them. Their research is giving us a clearer picture of what the emotional life of animals is, and how we can ensure that their environment suitably protects their welfare.

Cow psychology

Dr Becky Whay, Senior Lecturer in Animal Welfare and Behaviour, has a passion for cattle. With a background in farming and a PhD in Animal Sciences, much of her working life has been devoted to understanding how cows think. ‘They’re quite enigmatic animals,’ she says. ‘It’s fascinating trying to understand how the world appears to them.’

What’s particularly interesting in the extent to which cattle feel pain. The idea that animals might experience pain in a way that animals are partitioning their time during the day. The worth of the AWB group also feeds into the Cabot committees that wrote the reports on which the animal welfare for a new agricultural age.

The Animal Welfare and Behaviour (AWB) group aims to build lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with other organisations that have interests in the welfare of animals, including governmental and industry bodies, and animal welfare charities.

One such organisation is the Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), which was set up over 30 years ago in response to consumer concerns over the welfare of factory farmed animals. FAWC provides independent advice to government on welfare issues relevant to legislation and Codes of Practice. Several scientists from Bristol’s Vet School have been involved in this work.

The EC outlawed the prevalent barren battery cage at the beginning of the year. ‘Enriched’ cages must provide perches, a nest, a scratching area and at least 600cm usable area per hen to allow hens to express their predominant needs. The AWB group performed much of the original scientific work that demonstrated these behavioural needs, and Professor Christine Nicol was the UK representative on the European committees that wrote the reports on which the legislation was based.

The worth of the AWB group also feeds into the Cabot Institute’s food security programme, in the area of animal welfare for a new agricultural age.
Prevention has never been the kind of thing that makes headlines. Few know this better than Professor Malcolm Evans, a member of the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (SPT), and in Chair since 2011. “Mention the word torture and people flinch on the extremists—the type of intentional, systematic cruelty you’ll never eliminate,” he says. “Torture is prohibited under international law, but that doesn’t stop it happening.”

The work of the SPT is much more long term and involves changing perceptions about what constitutes humane behaviour. “There’s another side to torture—the kind of ‘unthinking’ violence meted out daily in detention centres, prisons and police stations around the world,” says Evans. “That’s something you can tackle, by helping states establish robust criminal justice systems that rule out such casual ill treatment.”

It’s not glamorous, but it makes a real difference to many people’s lives.

In it for the long haul
Evans’ involvement in torture prevention stretches back to the early 1990s, when the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture sought the help of Rod Morgan, Professor of Criminology at Bristol, to set up training courses on visiting places of detention. Evans provided the international legal expertise. He then developed links with the Association for the Prevention of Torture, a Geneva-based non-governmental organisation that was one of the drivers behind the United Nations Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT; see panel on right). Following on from his work around the European system, Evans fed into the protocol’s drafting process. When the OPCAT came into being in 2006, Evans collaborated with colleague Professor Rachel Murray (LLM 1995) on a project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to monitor its progress. So began a long association with the UN.

Compliance and co-operation
The SPT takes its mandate from OPCAT. States parties choose to ratify OPCAT to demonstrate their commitment to the protection of human rights and the prevention of torture and ill treatment. It’s a completely new way of approaching human rights, says Evans. “Traditional approaches are based on accountability and punishment,” he explains. “There are laws that stipulate the right to life, to freedom from torture, to freedom of expression and so on; these are the standards against which states’ behaviour is assessed. If your rights are violated, you should be provided with a remedy.”

This is essential, of course, but it doesn’t stop a breach from occurring—or from recurring. While recognising the need for accountability, the SPT seeks to establish mechanisms to prevent torture and ill treatment in the first place, as Evans says, “it’s better if human rights violations don’t happen at all.”

The SPT is also distinctive in that it operates at both international and national levels. It has the capacity to conduct visits to places of detention in the jurisdiction of party states but OPCAT also requires states parties to put in place national preventive mechanisms (NPMs). One of the jobs of the SPT is to help states do this, and to advise and assist the NPMs themselves in their work of reducing—or eliminating—the risk of torture. “Our visits may be unannounced, but they’re not designed to catch people out,” says Evans. “The idea is to make practical recommendations to improve conditions of detainees and in the long run to safeguard against ill treatment.”

Discipline and detachment
Visits can be demanding, both physically and emotionally. “Every country has its challenges,” says Evans. “Some of the detention centres are very remote—it took a two-hour helicopter ride followed by a two-hour trip in a jeep on unpaved roads to get to one place we wanted to look at in Liberia.”

Although states agree to the principle of inspections, SPT members are sometimes treated with suspicion. “To be fair, if you’re running a prison in an isolated location and some foreigners turn up waving papers and demanding access to interview the inmates on behalf of the UN, you might want to check their credentials,” says Evans. “You have to be diplomatic when you’re negotiating with some foreigners turn up waving papers and demanding access to interview the inmates on behalf of the UN, you might want to check their credentials,” says Evans. “You have to be diplomatic when you’re negotiating with
Brave new world

someone holding a machine gun. But we have local liaison officers who can verify our mandate – and we’re very persistent.’

Once inside a facility, the challenge is to remain focused on the purpose of the visit. ‘We can’t intervene in individual cases,’ says Evans. ‘That’s extremely difficult, especially when you’ve been talking to someone who’s been locked up in appalling conditions, and you know exactly what they like going back to when you leave. Half of you wants to prolong the conversation to delay that inevitability, and the other half is aware that you never spend with this person, who may not have been allowed out of his cell for months, the less time you have for seeing others.’

Quid pro quo

In return for unprecedented access to places of detention, the SPT keeps its reports confidential unless states agree to make them public. Around half the committee’s reports have been published so far – and not just those that are beyond criticism. ‘This is huge and non-negotiable’, says Evans. ‘It shows a remarkable degree of honesty and a willingness to improve things.’

It comes as a surprise that some democracies have not yet ratified OPCAT, while others with historically poor human rights records, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cambodia, have done so. Evans believes that the example these countries set encourages others to ratify, Tunisia, for example, is the first of the Arab Spring countries to come on board, and there are signs that others will follow suit.

How much can the SPT realistically achieve? Not all that much in terms of inspections, conceds Evans. A visit may lead to many recommendations, such as, for example, moving detainees to alternative accommodation in a case of chronic overcrowding, improving conditions, or even to close a facility down. But there’s a limit to how many visits teams drawn from few states can make in a year – currently only about six. The committee is, however, making greater strides in the area of helping states to establish national structures with a similar mandate to its own. ‘To the UK, we’re used to the idea of having independent inspectors, but it’s new territory for many countries,’ says Evans. ‘The SPT spends a lot of time working with states to ensure that they have their own mechanisms in place to create effective monitoring bodies.’

Familiar as he is with the slow-moving wheels of international diplomacy, Evans is heartened by how much OPCAT has achieved in the short time since its implementation. While the lawyer in him takes nothing for granted – once states establish preventative mechanisms, they still have to maintain them – he is cautiously optimistic. A new era of universal understanding? Time will tell.

United we stand

Who has ratified OPCAT?

Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Georgia, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Senegal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay

Entente mondiale

So far, 62 states have ratified OPCAT. That may not sound like many, but is nearly a third of the world’s countries. Evans believes its success is due to its forward-looking nature. ‘We’re not out to prosecute past misdemeanours; we’re interested in the future,’ he says. ‘The more that states understand that, the more willing they are to engage with us. It can be difficult to get that message across, especially when other international mechanisms work differently, but we keep pushing away.’

WE’RE NOT OUT TO PROSECUTE FOR PAST MISDEMEANOURS; WE’RE INTERESTED IN THE FUTURE

Benin, Honduras, Maldives, Mexico, Paraguay, Sweden, Switzerland have made the SPT’s visit report public

Saturday 9 June

Tracing human ancestry using DNA // Cambridge

The Cambridge Branch invites you to hear Professor Peter Forster, Director of Research at the Institute for Forensic Genetics in Munich (Germany), talk about how DNA can be used to trace family histories over thousands of years.

Wednesday 20 June

Victorian London walk

Join the London Branch of the University of Bristol Alumni on the ‘Darkest Victorian London Walk’ led by an experienced Blue Badge guide and followed by light buffet supper. (Repeatead 12 July)

Friday 8 – Sunday 10 July

Alumni Weekend 2012: Best of Bristol

Come back to Bristol and enjoy a packed weekend of lectures, lunches, friends and tours.

There will be special anniversary celebrations for those who graduated in 2002, 1992, 1982, 1972, and earlier.

Saturday 7 July

Valedictory Lecture: Emeritus Professor Bob Evans // Bristol

Professor Evans PhD 1970 on ‘Understanding the states of matter.

45 years and still trying. Popular professors who have moved on to ‘emeritus’ status are invited to give a Valedictory Lecture to former students, alumni and friends.

Saturday 7 July

Valedictory Lecture: Emeritus Professor Stephen Linsky // Bristol

Professor Linsky (BSc 1972, BDS 1975, PhD 1987, MA 2003) on ‘The survival of mankind and the concept of spinal reflex action’ (1832). Popular professors who have moved on to ‘emeritus’ status are invited to give a Valedictory Lecture to former students, alumni and friends.

Saturday 7 July

Convocation (Bristol University’s alumni association) AGM // Bristol

See details and absentee ballot paper, enclosed.

Friday 21 – Sunday 23 September

The 10th annual Eastern European alumni reunion 2012 // Canada

This reunion will centre on the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Ontario and combines theatre with a reunion dinner.

Thursday 27 September

Alumni forum: Understanding admissions and student funding // London

Especially for parents and friends of current and soon-to-be university applicants: a university view on undergraduate admissions and student life.

Saturday 29 September

Midlands Branch visit to Winterbourne House and Garden // Birmingham

The University of Bristol Midlands Branch of Convocation invites alumni to join them for a visit followed by lunch at Winterbourne House.
In order of degree date

William Anzum (BA 1938, Diploma 1942) died December 2011, aged 97
Douglas Thomas (BS 1936) died February 2012, aged 97
Margaret Bartlett (nee Pocock) (BA 1933, Diploma 1938) died October 2011, aged 96
Dr Alfred Nowell Peach FRCS (BA 1937) died January 2012, aged 88
Philip Nethercott (LB 1938) died August 2011, aged 93
Dr William Heath-Ward (BS 1934, Diploma 1938) died June 2011, aged 91
Dr Gawain Herdman (AB 1937, PhD 1947) died January 2012, aged 88
Peter Yates (BA 1941) died 2011, aged 85
Molly Cairns (BA 1937, Cert Ed 1940) died November 2011, aged 84
Dr Charles Crosson (BA 1936, PhD 1947) died January 2012, aged 81
Ernest Brook (BA 1936) died November 2011, aged 84
Jean Daniels (BA 1952, Cert Ed 1953) died March 2011, aged 77
Christopher Lapworth (BS 1935, Cert Ed 1936, Adv Cert Ed 1939) died October 2011, aged 78
Dr Philip Barry (MB 1935) died October 2011, aged 88
Margaret Burkeys (nee Pollard) (BA 1935) died 2011, aged 78
Alan Gaud (BA 1935) died October 2011, aged 77
Dr Kenneth Parry (MB 1935) died October 2011, aged 79
William Wood (BA 1935) died November 2011, aged 79
Christopher Bowes (BA 1936) died February 2012, aged 78
Dr John Hardy (MB 1936, PhD 1938) died July 2011, aged 71
Robert Eccles (BA 1937) died 2011, aged 76
John Green (BA 1937) died 2012, aged 78
The Rev Canon Eric Grimshaw (BS 1937) died September 2011, aged 77
Professor Richard Redwood (BSc 1937, PhD 1945) died October 2011, aged 75
Brian Tottenhall (BS 1937) died July 2011, aged 77
Peter Cushings (BA 1938) died 2011, aged 77
Alan Davis (BSA 1904, Cert Ed 1905) died June 2011, aged 82
Dr Sydney Spragg (BSA 1923, PhD 1941) died September 2011, aged 84
Anthony Bennett (BS 1933) died November 2011, aged 82
Philip Bishop (BS 1934) died October 2011, aged 78
Dr Rancho Lake (MB 1935) died February 2011, aged 85
Judith Blair-Brown (nee Price) (BA 1934, Cert Ed 1935) died August 2011, aged 79
Margaret Dennison (nee Morrow) (BA 1934) died March 2011, aged 77
Dr Philip Barry (MB 1935) died October 2011, aged 88
Margaret Burkeys (nee Pollard) (BA 1935) died 2011, aged 78
Alan Gaud (BA 1935) died October 2011, aged 77
Dr Kenneth Parry (MB 1935) died October 2011, aged 79
William Wood (BA 1935) died November 2011, aged 79
Christopher Bowes (BA 1936) died February 2012, aged 78
Dr John Hardy (MB 1936, PhD 1938) died July 2011, aged 71
Robert Eccles (BA 1937) died 2011, aged 76
John Green (BA 1937) died 2012, aged 78
The Rev Canon Eric Grimshaw (BS 1937) died September 2011, aged 77
Professor Richard Redwood (BSc 1937, PhD 1945) died October 2011, aged 75
Brian Tottenhall (BS 1937) died July 2011, aged 77
Peter Cushings (BA 1938) died 2011, aged 77
Alan Davis (BSA 1904, Cert Ed 1905) died August 2011, aged 75
Thomas Wymark (BSG 1931) died October 2011, aged 73
Gillian Bedfield (nee Threlfall) (BS 1962, MA 1968) died August 2011, aged 70
Dr Geoffrey Burton (AB 1962) died February 2012, aged 72
Alison Baxter (BA 1963, Cert Ed 1965) died February 2012, aged 70
Christopher Taylor (AB 1963) died December 2011, aged 70
Roderick Fox (BS 1964) died June 2011, aged 79
Susan Mira (nee brown) (BA 1964) died August 2011, aged 65
Michael Pearce (BA 1965) died August 2011, aged 72
Derek Walkerdine (BA 1986, MSc 1988) died January 2012, aged 67
Jonathan Latham (LB 1966) died May 2011, aged 65
Dr Veronica Totten-Brown (nee Wilsor) (BA 1968) died March 2012, aged 67
Dr Richard France (FID 1968) died February 2012, aged 73
Marcia Wilson (nee Lockyer) (BA 1968) died May 2011, aged 65
The Rev Mr Malcolm Grills (BA 1978) died July 2011, aged 62
Professor John Turner (PHD 1978) died July 2011, aged 62
Dr Richard France (FID 1968) died February 2012, aged 73
Marcia Wilson (nee Lockyer) (BA 1968) died May 2011, aged 65
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of it as an individual thing, born when an older lineage splits and then becomes extinct.

The relation between a species and the organisms that belong to it is akin to that between a multicellular organism like you or me, and the cells in our body, says Okasha, ‘they’re parts of the whole. So if you find an organism on Mars that resembles a domestic dog but has no connection with the dog lineage here on Earth, then you’d have to conclude that it’s not a dog.’ That might seem a hair-splitting distinction, but many biologists believe it offers a possible guide to appraising the species concept in practice—for instance, when measuring biodiversity.

Questions of degree
Okasha and colleagues in the Department of Philosophy run postgraduate courses that bring philosophy to bear on science, mathematics, psychology, cognitive science, and biology. ‘These are aimed at students with a science degree who have found that it doesn’t quite scratch an itch,’ he says. ‘They might be curious about the history of the ideas behind the theories, or about how their basic principles tie in with other areas of enquiry. And there are broader questions: How confident can we be about scientific theories? How should we understand the relationship between evidence and theory?’

That’s not to say that science is badly taught, he adds. ‘In some ways, it’s good to have a separation between learning something and reflecting philosophically on it. But I do think that the more we can get people to see that profound philosophical issues are raised by science, the better.’

Doubt and Darwinism
Philosophy does seem to attract people with nagging doubts about something other field. ‘We tend to have a rather chaotic intellectual trajectory,’ says Okasha. ‘Philosophy often attracts people who have studied other things but become a little disillusioned. It can be a kind of refuge for malcontents from other subjects.’

Okasha’s undergraduate work was in philosophy and economics, but he was drawn to a new sub-discipline called philosophy of biology. ‘I’m particularly intrigued by the way that many issues in political and social philosophy also crop up in evolutionary biology,’ he says. ‘One of my research projects involved studying the tension between individual self-interest and the welfare of the group, and how both evolutionary biology and philosophy address this trade-off. Both have versions of the theory that individuals acting in a self-interested way can produce outcomes that are not beneficial for their groups, community or species. And both try to explain why animals sometimes sacrifice themselves for the welfare of others, even those not their genetic relatives.’

Head to head
In academia, scientists and philosophers have interacted in positive and often fruitful ways: the flourishing of cognitive science in the 1970s, for example, was the result of work by philosophers as well as psychologists. Okasha, who spends half his professional life with philosophers and half with scientists, has observed the differences between these species at close quarters.

‘Your typical philosophy talk goes on for an hour, he says, ‘plus another hour of discussions, thrashing out some tiny point, everyone pitching in.’ A science talk generally last half as long, with fewer questions.

It’s about pitting one position against another
‘But argument is intrinsic to philosophy,’ he points out, ‘it’s all about pitting one position against another. So I always have to remember which company I’m in when I’m talking.’ Not that scientists are unfailingly polite, but the adversarial approach tends to devalue exceptions, even aggressive, people. ‘That might help to explain the rather embarrassing gender imbalance in philosophy,’ adds Okasha. ‘At the top of the profession only about five percent of philosophy professors are women. I think we could learn something from science’s model of presenting and discussing ideas.’

Right to roam
But as science’s model of working towards concrete conclusions … ‘We don’t really do conclusions,’ he laughs. ‘But that’s why philosophy complements science so well, without the pressure to produce definitive results, philosophers can explore the ambiguities of science more thoroughly.’ As Okasha says, ‘These are important and interesting ideas for anyone who’s interested in the bigger picture, and in what science can – and can’t – reveal about the world.’
Everyone can leave a legacy. Please think about it.

The Department of Music has been able to buy a suite of new instruments, thanks to a legacy from a mature student, who had wanted to help others enjoy his passion for music.

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bristol.ac.uk/centenarycampaign/how/legacies