

# HORIZON

from Staffordshire University

## Shaping Creative Careers

Graduates celebrate national awards and placements with household brands

## Changing Face Of Spode

Once a factory of fine bone china, Horizon finds out more about the exciting new era for Spode Works

## A Life Behind The Lens

With a mission to fix the film industry, sought-after producer Julia Verdin is making waves in Hollywood

2019



## PLASTICS: A GLOBAL CRIME SCENE



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# HORIZON

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**RILEY  
RAVEN**



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# Welcome



## Connected to success

**A**s Vice-Chancellor I take enormous pride in the continued growth we are enjoying at Staffordshire University.

This is visible through plans for flagship study spaces and ascendancy in higher education rankings as we work hard to help our students flourish and succeed.

We are delighted to have made great progress in the league tables, rising to 44th in the *Guardian* University league tables and 57th in the *Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide* where we also came in at 9th place for teaching quality and 22nd in the social inclusion rankings.

We have also announced plans for the new Catalyst Building, which will take the place of the Brindley Building on the University's Stoke-on-Trent campus. The Catalyst Building will become a hub for students and the local community, featuring a new library, digital skills centre and study base for thousands of new apprenticeships.

At Staffordshire University we endeavour to play a leading role in global affairs by researching the issues that affect us all and there are few greater challenges facing the planet today than plastic pollution.

We've all been jolted by recent TV documentaries showing harrowing scenes of sea creatures caught up in plastic waste, and the ground-breaking work of Dr Claire Gwinnett, Associate Professor of Forensic Science at Staffordshire University, is tackling the matter

in a unique way; by treating it as a crime scene.

Read about Dr Gwinnett's award-winning research inside.

Elsewhere, you'll find features on the importance of political engagement in student life, the changing face of our University and new facilities for nursing studies to meet the needs of 21st century healthcare.

We also interview independent film producer Julia Verdin, a Staffordshire University alumna, who has worked with some of the biggest names in Hollywood, and is now using her influence to address diversity within the movie industry.

Finally, congratulations to our creative arts students and graduates who have enjoyed an outstanding year of high-profile award wins, industry placements and small business launches.

As someone who believes passionately in the transformative power of higher education, reading these features makes me 'Proud to Be Staffs'. There is a huge amount of positive work happening in our University and we are excited to share our news with alumni, stakeholders and friends across the world through *Horizon* magazine.

I hope you enjoy this issue.

**Professor Liz Barnes**  
**Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive**

# Events on campus in 2019

Throughout the year, the University hosts a wide range of public events, including lectures, workshops, film screenings, open days, degree shows and exhibitions. They also include our popular "Profs in the Pav" series of talks from leading academics, in the informal surroundings of the Beacon Building's Pavilion fusion eatery.

Most events are free to attend, but some require advance booking. To see what's coming up, visit [staffs.ac.uk/events](http://staffs.ac.uk/events) or contact [comms@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:comms@staffs.ac.uk) for more information.

**Monday 28 January, 10am – 11.30am**  
**HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 2019**  
**COMMEMORATIVE EVENT**

Science Centre, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Thursday 31 January, 12pm – 1:00pm**  
**HOLOCAUST AWARENESS 'LUNCH AND LEARN' SESSION WITH PROFESSOR CAROLINE STURDY COLLS**

Toos, Beacon Building, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Monday 4 February, 5.30pm**  
**PROFS IN THE PAV – 'THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW'**

'An apple a day keeps the doctor away' by Associate Professor Dr Rachel Povey focuses on children's eating behaviour and perceptions of healthy eating.

Pavilion Fusion Café, Beacon Building, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Wednesday 27 February, 6pm – 8.30pm**  
**PSYCHOLOGY AND ME**

An interactive evening where you can get hands-on with some fascinating equipment and hear from experts in the field.

Science Centre, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Monday 4 March, 5.30pm**  
**PROFS IN THE PAV – 'THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW'**

'The Exercising Female' by Associate Professor Dr Jacky Forsyth talks about research specific to women, trends in exercise participation and how to boost sports performance.

Pavilion Fusion Café, Beacon Building, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Wednesday 6 March, 4.00pm – 7.00pm**  
**POSTGRADUATE OPEN EVENT**

Registration – Science Centre, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Thursday 7 March, 5.30pm**  
**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY LECTURE 'WALKING THE TIGHTROPE'**

Associate Professor Dr Laura Walton-Williams explores how misconceptions arising from bias and gender stereotyping

impacts on the reporting and prosecution of sexual offences. #BalanceforBetter

Lecture Theatre, Science Centre, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Thursday 21 March, 5.30pm**  
**PROFS IN DUDLEYS – 'THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW'**

'Tap your way to Wellbeing' by Professor Liz Boath introduces you to the self-help technique known as EFT or Tapping and research into its effectiveness.

Dudley's Cafe, Blackheath Lane, Stafford Campus

**Saturday 23 March, 9.00am – 4.00pm**  
**UNDERGRADUATE OPEN DAY – STOKE-ON-TRENT CAMPUS**

Registration – Science Centre, Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

**Monday 1 April, 5.30pm**  
**PROFS IN THE PAV – 'THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW'**

'How to conquer stress like a Roman Emperor: 2000 years of Smarter Thinking' by Associate Professor Dr Martin Turner steps back in time to discover how ancient philosophers set the foundations for powerful and effective ways to control our emotions.

Pavilion Fusion Café, Beacon Building, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus

## Save the dates

**Friday 31 May 5.30pm – 8.30pm**  
**SHOW AND TELL ART AND DESIGN DEGREE SHOW OPENING**

Ember Square, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent Campus.  
 Saturday 1 – Sunday 9 June

**Week Commencing 3 June**  
**GRADEX19 - SHOWCASE OF GRADUATE PROJECTS**

Stoke-on-Trent Campus. Venues tbc

**Week Commencing 8 July**  
**STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY AWARDS CEREMONIES**

Trentham Gardens

## WRITE TO HORIZON

*We are always delighted to receive your letters, emails and messages on social media. If you would like to connect with us to comment on the magazine, share anecdotes or suggest future articles, please get in touch.*

Please contact us by email at [graduate.relations@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:graduate.relations@staffs.ac.uk) or write to **Horizon magazine, Graduate Relations, Staffordshire University, College Road, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 2DE.**



If you're happy for your message to be published in a future issue of *Horizon*, please mark it "for publication". Letters may be edited for length.

## CONNECT WITH US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The University has a wide-ranging presence on social media. As well as our official accounts there are special-interest groups covering everything from the Careers Network and International Students to individual subjects such as Engineering, Games Design and Business. See [staffs.ac.uk/socialmedia](http://staffs.ac.uk/socialmedia) for the complete list. They're a great way to keep up with us and network with fellow Staffordshire graduates.



Find us on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, LinkedIn and other social media channels.



# PLASTICS:

A GLOBAL CRIME SCENE

*Staffordshire University  
is leading the charge  
against global plastic  
pollution with forensic  
scientist Dr Claire  
Gwinnett undertaking  
revolutionary research  
into the issue*

**I**t is three years since the Government introduced a tax on plastic carrier bags that forced households to think twice about our throwaway culture.

Since the 5p levy came into force, the number of bags used has gone down by a staggering 85 per cent in England, meaning nine billion fewer plastic bags are being used.

Ministers have now confirmed the plastic bag levy will double to 10p and will be extended to small local shops.

Environmental campaigners are now calling for charges on plastic bottles and disposable coffee cups in the hope of producing a similar effect, while cosmetics – particularly face scrubs – and takeaway cartons are also coming under similar scrutiny.

Conservation issues connected to single-use plastics are very much in the public eye with Sky News' Ocean Rescue campaign shining a spotlight on the issues affecting marine health.

The broadcasting giant is attempting to find innovative solutions to the problem of ocean plastics, and inspire people to make small everyday changes that can make a difference.

One of the most harrowing images from the BBC's *Blue Planet II*, narrated by Sir David Attenborough, brought the problems of plastic pollution to the masses as a sperm whale attempted to eat a discarded plastic bucket; footage that has been seen by millions.

And marine biologist Liz Bonnin was brought to tears during the recent BBC documentary *Drowning in Plastic* as she witnessed seals being strangled to death by plastic fishing ropes.

Staffordshire University is playing a leading role in the search for solutions to the global plastic pollution problem in a revolutionary way... by treating the harmful waste as a crime scene.

Dr Claire Gwinnett, Associate Professor of Forensic and Crime Science and advisor to TV drama *Silent Witness*, is among only 150 people to receive a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship this year.

She specialises in microfibre analysis and was part of the research team that discovered the first evidence of deep-sea animals ingesting microplastics.

Funding from The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust has allowed Dr Gwinnett to build on this research by working with international experts across the USA throughout the summer of 2018 with a research visit to Australia planned for next year.

"Microplastics are currently a major issue for the planet – it has been found that these plastic particulates are everywhere including in our drinking water and in the food we eat." Says Dr Gwinnett.

"As far as I know we're the only research group bringing forensic science to plastic pollution. It's our USP.

**MICROPLASTICS  
IS CURRENTLY  
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– IT HAS BEEN  
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PARTICULATES  
ARE EVERYWHERE**



“Our Forensic Fibres and Plastic Pollution Research Group was originally just me but now, thankfully, we’re building capacity with more researchers and academics.

“As a group, we’re expanding our areas of expertise and one of the questions to come out of the forensic science department was how we can apply forensic science to the plastic pollution problem?

“It seems really odd! People commented that this isn’t CSI. It doesn’t fit together, but there’s so much that plastic pollution and, in particular, microplastics can learn from forensic science.

“I’m a trace evidence analyst. I look at bits of plastic and fibres from crime scenes to try and find out where they came from, why they’re there and what has happened to them, to solve crimes.

“What we’re trying to do in the ocean is take tiny pieces of plastic and microfibres and find out where they’ve come from and how they got there.

“We’re asking exactly the same questions. The way we approach a fibre from a crime scene is the same approach being used to analyse microfibres found in sediment or deep-sea animals.

“We need to find the sources of these materials; for example from macroplastic items, from fishing nets or from clothing.

“Before approaching it in this way researchers would conclude what plastic type it was, and that was pretty much the end of it. For the last 50 years through forensic fibre analysis we’ve shown you can find out so much more than that by bringing the two together. We’re getting a much more informed approach.”

Dr Gwinnett was chosen from thousands of applicants and was inspired to apply for the funding after seeing Staffordshire University colleague Dr Laura Walton-Williams secure a fellowship to research sexual offences in the USA and Canada last year.

For the project, Dr Gwinnett investigated different international practices in microplastic research and identified best practice which can be adopted for use in environmental research in the UK.

She visited the US for three weeks and worked in Washington DC collecting samples from the Potomac River Basin and in San Francisco with a company looking at sustainable alternatives to plastic packaging. Staffordshire University is in the process of setting up a project to look at how the UK can apply similar processes and to set new standards to test proposed alternatives to plastics.

“Currently, there is no standardised method for the characterisation and quantification of microplastics globally – which is needed if we are ever going to truly know the extent of this pollution and the effect on marine



**THESE DOCUMENTARIES ARE AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF GETTING A PASSIONATE RESPONSE FROM THE PUBLIC AND TO GET PEOPLE TO THINK DIFFERENTLY**

life and humans,” explains Dr Gwinnett.

“This makes this an excellent topic for the fellowship which aims to encourage international collaboration to solve real issues such as this.

“This is such an important topic that affects everyone on the planet and fellowships such as this will really help change the future of our environment.

“Some alternatives just turn into microplastics quicker, and the problems still exist. We need to use data more effectively to provide accurate, trusted measurements of any proposed replacements to plastics.

“California was chosen for the research visit because they’re so pro-active at a business and consumer level. It was fascinating to see Californians leading the way through lobbying and making change in legislation. The UK could learn a lot.”

Dr Gwinnett praises the introduction of the 5p carrier-bag tax in 2015 and is calling for similar measures to make us think about our daily buying habits.

“Since the 5p bag tax was introduced it has made a massive impact. It helps the discussion about taxing single-use plastics because it has been proven to work and is effective,” she says.

“The takeaway box debate, the plastic bottle debate... a similar thing would definitely have the equivalent effect.

“We know bottle-tops are one of the top-ten items littering beaches globally and any use of data to see how people are changing their ways is superb. That’s exactly what happened with plastic bags; they were one of the main contributors to pollution beforehand, but much less so now. The facts are clear.”

Dr Gwinnett watches TV news coverage and peak-time documentaries showing the distressing footage of marine life caught up in plastic waste and is as saddened as the millions of other viewers now familiar with the issue.

“It is truly awful to see, yet these documentaries are an effective way of getting a passionate response from the public and to get people to think differently.

“When you have images like that they really stick out. People are starting to talk about microplastics more and this link to wildlife gets people thinking. People get bored of being told they must change, but we really have to find ways of keeping the public debate going.

“It needs something like the *Drowning in Plastic* documentary to keep pushing the issue and to keep it alive. It’s a hot topic now but the biggest challenge is making sure it is still a hot topic in 12 or 24 months.”

A sense of innovation and entrepreneurship in the field of plastic pollution solutions excites and encourages Dr Gwinnett to believe we can find long-term sustainable alternatives.

“As a researcher getting into this area more

## KNOW YOUR PLASTICS

◇ **Macroplastics**  
(2.5cm to 10cm)

◇ **Mesoplastics**  
(5mm to 2.5cm)

◇ **Nano particles** (smaller than a micrometre, the equivalent of around 1/70th of the width of an average human hair)

and more, it's incredibly encouraging when you see or meet people attempting to tackle it in really innovative ways.

"It's exciting that new ideas are coming out through engineering or science, but at the same time when you're confronted with images of giant 'trash islands' it's truly daunting.

"It's one thing to be able to clean-up what's already in the oceans, which itself is a massive task, but then you start to think about how you attempt to stem the constant flow of trash in the future.

"What we're trying to do is put some real data and science behind the whole issue. It's both exciting and daunting in equal measure."

The lecturer, who has delivered speeches about forensic science around the world, is now challenging consumers and households to think about how they use plastic in all areas of day-to-day life; from face scrubs and Christmas decorations to takeaway food cartons.

Thousands of tonnes of plastic microbeads from products such as exfoliating face scrubs wash into the sea every year, leading to a UK-wide ban on the manufacture of cosmetics containing the tiny pieces of plastic.

Glitter, found in Christmas decorations, greetings cards and other sparkly household goods, is chiefly made of inorganic plastics such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC).

This can enter seas and oceans from rivers, via wastewater from homes and via run-off from landfill sites. Although many microplastics are removed at wastewater treatment plants, a huge amount of microplastics still find their way through to the sea.

Scientists are now calling for all forms of plastic glitter to be banned because their size makes them an appealing - but dangerous - food item for sea creatures.

The calls for a ban have been met with some resistance and accusations that this represents scientists 'wanting to take the sparkle out of life', but we don't have to go all the way from bling to bland, claims Dr Gwinnett.

"Just as manufacturers of facial scrubs are looking at using natural exfoliating materials, such as apricot or walnut husks, glitter manufacturers have now started producing biodegradable glitter, available from many online stores," she explains.

"Biodegradable glitter is made from the cellulose of plants,

such as the eucalyptus tree, grown on land unsuitable for food crops using sustainable forestry initiatives that require little water. On top of that, it is also compostable – truly an eco-glitter.

"Even the company where modern glitter was born is getting environmentally friendly: Meadowbrook Inventions also now supplies biodegradable glitter, which means that with such a major supplier on board, there is hope for sparkly yet environmentally friendly Christmases in the future."

And that Friday night post-pub takeaway you enjoyed last weekend? If you are a careful consumer, you will have checked to see if it's recyclable before throwing it in the bin. Sadly, not many people consider this.

"Even some of those that are recyclable may be thrown into general waste if they have food residue on them that can't be rinsed off," adds Dr Gwinnett.

"And how many people carry round washing-up liquid and a sponge on a Friday night anyway?"

"These containers enter our waterways from land or through drainage systems. Now imagine that takeaway box has made its way to sea via urban waterways, moving with the currents until it reaches the deep ocean. At this stage, your takeaway box is a megaplastic (items of plastic bigger than 10cm in size that stay intact for a long time).

"These plastics have been made to resist age and not break down easily.

They can move around the planet, enter huge floating garbage patches, reach far-flung beaches and become buried in sand and sediment.

"But these takeaway boxes and bottles don't just stay as they were when we were using them. The containers slowly degrade and break down. Depending on the size of your takeaway box, this can mean one box is turned into millions of pieces.

"So, is this the last we see of your takeaway box? Unfortunately, no.

"At this stage, the box may be at its most dangerous. The many individual pieces can be eaten by marine life large and small, even those in the deepest depths of the ocean.

"So how much do you really care that your Friday night takeaway is being served in a plastic tray? Would it taste different if it was in a recycled cardboard container or even something as hipster as a bamboo tray?"

"However you feel about this, without some action, you actually might end up eating your discarded takeaway box at some point in the future."

## SO HOW MUCH DO YOU REALLY CARE THAT YOUR FRIDAY NIGHT TAKEAWAY IS BEING SERVED IN A PLASTIC TRAY?





# MINDS WITH BRILLIANT FUTURES

*From national awards in ceramics and stationery design to placements with industry giants in retail and interiors, Staffordshire University students and graduates excelled throughout 2018. Horizon magazine finds out more.*



Holly Kemp

**C**reative arts students from Staffordshire University have enjoyed an outstanding year of awards wins and placements.

The University's BA (Hons) 3D Designer Maker and MA Ceramics courses performed exceptionally well at summer show New Designers – winning the Best Overall Stand Award.

New Designers was held over two weeks at the Business Design Centre in Islington, London.

42 students from Staffordshire University courses including BA (Hons) Product Design and BA (Hons) Transport Design were represented at the show.

MA Ceramics Design student Laura Plant won both The Denby Award and the National Trust Artisan & Craft Award, which gives her the opportunity to work with Derbyshire-based Denby on a live project and to create a product range exclusively for the National Trust. Judges praised Laura's "beautiful pots", ceramic techniques and craftsmanship.

Laura and fellow MA student Holly Kemp have also won prestigious placements with Sainsbury's Home.

Holly, who was supported by Staffordshire University's Be Inspired programme to help her buy her own kiln, now runs her own business called HK Design.

"Exhibiting at New Designers was a great experience with lots of opportunities to speak to people in the industry," she said.

"I'm looking forward to working for Sainsbury's Home because it will allow me to learn how to design products for retail as well as the opportunity to create products in other materials as well as in ceramic.

"I love interior design and keeping up with the latest trends, and Sainsbury's Home is very good at producing on-trend products so it will be very exciting to work as a designer for them!

"I would like to keep expanding HK Design into a homeware brand with a growing collection of product ranges.

"Having my own studio means I can keep designing work to produce by hand myself, as well as designing for production at Sainsbury's Home, so it will be nice to be able to do both."

Cait Ava, who has completed her BA (Hons) 3D Designer Maker degree, also picked up the Denby 'highly commended' award and Surface Pattern student Francesca Hoyle was recognised by Ava Cad Cam in its Top 10 'ones to watch'.

Cait, along with Holly Kemp, Caitlin Darby and Jessie Roberts, were also honoured at the 2018 FRANZ Rising Star Project, which received around 400 pieces of artwork from applicants from 35 countries.

After 11 days of evaluation, 12 judges from the UK, Germany, France, Italy, South Korea, China and Taiwan selected 100 pieces of artwork and awarded them the FRANZ Rising Star Project Scholarship based on their average scores.

Holly won five scholarships for her bone china textured lighting, etched bone china vessel, 3D printed bone china textured lighting, Cobalt Memphis cups

and metallic geometric tableware. Cait won for Textures in White, while Caitlin was recognised for Decorative Vases and Jessie honoured for Sensory ceramics.

Helen Chapman, Associate Dean for Recruitment in the School of Creative Arts and Engineering, said: "We pride ourselves on our highly employable graduates and we're especially delighted that our ceramics expertise has set us apart this year."

Meanwhile, Blythe Bridge graduate Chris Mobley BA (Hons) Transport Design won the Superyacht UK Young Designer Competition 2018 during London Boat Show and two graduates from Illustration and Graphic Design won D&AD New Blood Awards.

D&AD Pencils are the pinnacle of student awards internationally and for James Hansell and Molly Turton having a Pencil win on their CV is a signifier of excellence to industry and will enhance their employability prospects hugely.

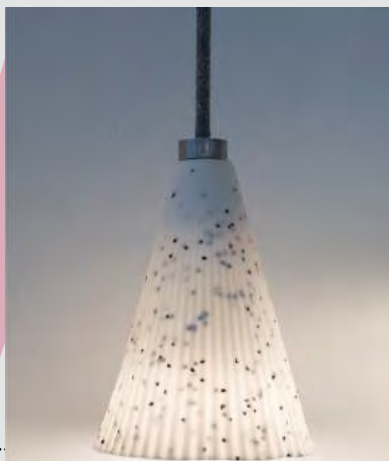
Staffordshire University students Leanne Haycock and Debbie Wigglesworth won all three awards in the Student Stationery Competition run in collaboration with London Stationery Show and The Paper Library. Their awards earned them prestigious placements with Portico, Paperchase and Caroline Gardner.

Leanne described winning the awards in the Student Stationery Competition as one of the highlights of her year, alongside her graduation.

"It was completely unexpected and the placements I won were surreal experiences!" said Leanne.

"Getting the opportunity to work with the design team at Paperchase in particular was something I will never forget and I learned so much during my week there. Not only that, but having the experience of working with such big names will open up so many more opportunities for my career.

"I am currently working as a freelancer and have a small stationery business of my own which I plan to grow and build over the coming years."



# A LIFE OF CRIME

*From football hooligans to prison injustice, Criminology Professor James Treadwell has a strong passion in working to understand society's shadier side. He talks about his latest research and reveals his love of The Sopranos.*

**A**s a society we're clearly obsessed with crime. From often fake news stories shared countless times on social media to the packed winter TV drama schedules, our fascination with murder, abuse and violence is seemingly never-ending.

But for Staffordshire University's Professor in Criminology James Treadwell, his work on a whole range of topics – from the English Defence League to drugs supply in prison – is far from fiction.

James has worked in the field for more than 20 years, starting his career with the National Probation Service before moving into academia in 2003. So what was it that drew him to become so involved in such a hard-hitting subject? "I chose criminology by chance really. I was working on nightclub doors and had a feeling I would probably find a way to make a living in the security industry," he says. "But criminology just appealed and I knew a fair bit about crime. I think I just got lucky and found something I came to love."

His modern research techniques combined with a passion for his subject and a sharp interest in challenging issues is what continues to drive James. One specific technique that he uses extensively in his work is ethnography – the systematic study of people and

cultures. "Ethnography is designed to explore cultural phenomena where the researcher observes society from the point of view of the subject of the study," explains James. "It means living amongst people in their world as they do, and I have sought to do that in some pretty interesting groups – football hooligans and the English Defence League being two such examples. I went out, engaged with people and got talking to them in pubs, at clubs, at demonstrations. You can see some of how I used the data on the EDL in my book with Simon Winlow and Steve Hall, *Rise of the Right*."

He also used ethnographical techniques for his most recent research topic into criminal drugs markets. "I have been using the same method to talk to criminals involved in cannabis cultivation, again going on to working class estates and into pubs, gyms and bars to gather data and try and look at what crime on the ground and at the coal face looks like today. The domestic cannabis cultivation business is massive and is where a lot of organised crime is right now in towns and cities across the country. It means a lot of crime is occurring out of the public eye, with violence and victimisation that people do not know about or think about."







- ◇ **England and Wales** has the highest imprisonment rate in western Europe with 141 inmates per 100,000 of the population.
- ◇ **The number of children** (under-18s) in custody in England and Wales has fallen by 70% in the last decade.
- ◇ **In 2017** more than 37,000 people entered prison to serve a sentence of less than a year, and figures show that nearly two-thirds will reoffend within a year of release.

One other major issue currently facing the UK is the rise of knife crime, leading many to question whether we have become more lawless than previous generations. “For me, we are very much in the middle of a problem that is about the impact of the transition from traditional forms of capital, community and politics to a globalised economy built on unstable labour markets and consumerism,” James points out. “The expansion of consumption through credit has created a culture obsessed with material goods, while austerity has stripped away our safety nets.

“Now a lot of crime, but by no means all, is about competitive individualism – the ‘me project’ – which is encountered in once solid working class communities stripped of value and meaning so that these have become places to escape from, rather than fight for and improve as a collective. In such communities, crime and violence is a way of achieving distinction. But the same values are there at the top strata of society too. Many of the social elite display the same values.”

There is also much talk in the media that we are too lenient on those who are found guilty of criminal activities and that modern prisons are more of a holiday camp than a form of punishment. “I have been in English, Welsh and Scottish prisons as well as ones in the US and I would not want to be in any of them. They are not the holiday camps that the tabloid newspapers talk about.

“Undoubtedly, prisons in the US are scary, but there are, or can be, quite extreme places in the UK too. I think overall, we treat prisoners badly, but we treat too many people in society badly. For me, prison should be about the loss of liberty, not poor treatment, but in the US and UK, as developed and wealthy countries, we do not get prisons right at all.

“I am particularly proud of my work on veterans in the Criminal Justice System with the Howard League for Prison reform. I think it really raised awareness and will hopefully lead to those who have served in our armed forces not being in jail in the future, with better support and provision for them.”

## “I have been in English, Welsh and Scottish prisons as well as ones in the US and I would not want to be in any of them.”

James is renowned not only for his exhaustive research but also as a media commentator, often being interviewed by the *BBC*, *ITV* and *Sky News* on contemporary crime stories. He has also appeared on the *BBC*'s *The One Show*, and their flagship moral and ethical debate programme, *The Big Questions* in addition to the award-winning documentary *A History of Now: the Story of the Noughties*. “I was taught by David Wilson and always agreed with him that the media is a way of making criminology accessible,” says James. “I still find the media a bit intimidating, but I will go on and comment if I think I am qualified and can add something useful to the discussion. For me, the media is where the public gain a lot of understanding about crime and so putting out good comments on myths and realities is important. Also, it makes my daughter think I am important!”

And with the raft of top-rated crime dramas on the TV, does he have any particular favourites – or at least ones he thinks are true to life? “I have just watched *Happy Valley* – I was late to discover it but it is brilliant. The Sopranos was the best programme ever made without a doubt, and I like *The Wire*. There are a lot of benefits in criminologists looking at fictional representations, and some fictional representations get close to reality. A big

part of criminology is looking at media representation, so I suppose watching crime drama could be classed as work.”

James sees no shortage of students signing up for his course at Staffordshire University due, in part, to the fact that the subject itself is so compelling. “Criminology is a rendezvous discipline and I think lots of people find it a welcoming home because it does offer practical solutions. But it is challenging, theoretical and engaging. I think most people would find criminology fascinating.

“Many of my students study the subject because they are interested in joining the police force, but criminology is so broad. Crime is a pretty recession-proof business, as Tony Soprano would say, but while some go into the police, prison service, security services, legal fields, charities and NGOs, I also have graduates go off to great careers in totally unrelated fields. But I also have some former students who become academics and who specialise in criminology.

“Research for me is about changing the world for the better, and if I can make a small contribution to that, then I am happy, but I get wins all the time. Seeing a former student progress into a good career is a win – graduation ceremonies every year are a highlight.”

# WHY POLITICS MATTERS

*In this fast-moving era of Trump, Brexit and political policy announced through social media, how concerned are today's students about announcements made by local MPs or senior Government?*

**I**n decades gone by, alongside the pursuit of academic qualifications, universities had long been places associated with politics, activism and functioning as safe spaces where students could challenge the ideas of the establishment.

In 2018 it could be argued that this association had diminished and popular opinion would suggest that student concerns are now mostly inward looking. But is this really the case?

With the political landscape in flux due to the Brexit vote and diplomatic relationships between nations being tested on several fronts, there has been a growing feeling among critics that engagement from young adults is not what it should be and that universities should have had a bigger part to play in recent events.

But while the face of politics may be changing, and campus activism possibly not as visible to some, student voices can still be heard – particularly at Staffordshire University which is home to some of the most politically progressive undergraduates in the country.

Current student and former President of Staffordshire University Students' Union, Darren Clarke is a prime example of this. Darren became one of the founder members of For Our Future's Sake (FFS), a national movement for students that is campaigning for a people's vote on the terms of Britain's exit from the European Union.

At a Staffordshire Students' Union meeting earlier this year, attendees voted in favour of supporting such

a vote, making them the first Students' Union in the United Kingdom to support the movement. This was then followed up by 140 students' union leaders, representing nearly one million students, joining forces with FFS to call for a people's vote on Brexit in an open letter to parliament.

This letter endeavoured to highlight the position of most students based on voting statistics from the referendum, stating: "Young people overwhelmingly voted against Brexit. Since the referendum result, numerous promises were made by the Leave campaign which have been shown to be completely false. Young people overwhelmingly want the current benefits of EU membership to be retained."

Such a galvanisation of students is perhaps evidence that they are not as politically passive as some would make out. Dr Peter Lamb, Professor of Politics and International Relations at Staffordshire, says: "When I talk to my students many of them seem very engaged in various political activities, even though these are not the old established ways such as involvement in political parties. Getting involved in an interest group and





pressure group activity is political, and there seems to be just as much of this, even if in different ways than before.”

So, while traditional political action may be waning on campus, there is of course new and innovative ways in which students are engaging with legislative and constitutional issues. With online and social media platforms influencing the opinions of more and more people, these issues are often not necessarily dictated by the policies of the main parties.

However, the short-term politics of recent years should perhaps be treated with caution as outcomes can become increasingly unpredictable, as Brexit and the election of Donald Trump to the White House have shown. And although the student population may have become somewhat put off by party politics, they may also be in danger of becoming disillusioned by the disinformation and ‘fake news’ that now litters the online world.

Staffordshire University’s Dr Tony Craig, Professor in Modern History, gave a talk in December entitled *Trump, Russia and International Election Crime*. The focus of the talk used the election of Donald Trump to highlight election interference in recent history and how disinformation was used during the Cold War as compared to now.

Dr Craig explained this influence on modern politics noting: “Today’s social media revolution has created opportunities for propagandists to supply disinformation and run influence campaigns without needing to go through the rigorous editorial checks of national newspapers first. There is no indication that Trump would have lost the election had the interference not occurred, but the very fact that it happened undermines democracy in a very confusing way.”

With regard to student voting numbers, universities should perhaps be doing more to avoid this kind of confusion. In the run up to last year’s general election Universities UK, the vice-chancellors’ organisation, ran a campaign to encourage university lecturers and staff to remind students to get their names on the electoral register and to vote. Initiatives included on-the-spot registrations using tablets, and a big focus on raising awareness via social media.

Tash Crump, current President of Staffordshire Students’ Union, said: “I think it’s important all students need to be reminded to register to vote. A lot of students don’t realise that they can register at their home and study addresses, and we raise awareness for this when something big is coming up, like an election or a referendum. We do this with a register to vote campaign which I think definitely helps maintain engagement on campus.”

Although this is certainly positive action, it might be that these institutions will have greater success by offering students unbiased facts on key issues that are unaffected by party policy or online skulduggery. This may be the key in keeping as many students as possible engaged with politics, despite the fact many will be disappointed by the result of the referendum. Students may also need to be made aware (despite the bewildering period in life that moving away to university can be) that their vote still matters – irrespective of how far away from their home constituency they are.

# “MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS SHOULD BE TOP PRIORITY”

*Mental health is more of an issue for today’s students than ever before — fortunately, there are resources out there for anyone who might be struggling.*

*Illustration by Michal Berdnarski*





**A** report published last summer by the Office for National Statistics indicated that the suicide rate among university students has gone up over the last ten years, and that there has been an uptake in students seeking help for their mental health and wellbeing. As the social taboos attached to subjects like mental illness continue to erode, people are feeling more encouraged to speak out — and for the first time, we are beginning to see a real picture demonstrating the full extent of the issue.

“A lot of difficulties are not caused by medical problems, but by everyday life problems, such as family or relationship issues, or anxiety about their work,” says Alan Percy, Head of Counselling at the University of Oxford.

“While these problems are distressing, through counselling we can help students to understand them, and then suggest strategies for dealing with their feelings.”

At some universities, as many as one in four students will access counselling services during their studies, but the real number of students who suffer from mental health issues may well be even higher — despite the important work being done

to open up the conversation around mental health, the subject still carries a stigma, which means that some individuals may be reluctant to ask for help.

“There is no room for complacency here,” says John de Pury, Assistant Director of Policy at Universities UK. “This remains an urgent challenge for universities and society.”

In an interview with *The Guardian* last summer, Sam Gyimah, the then United Kingdom’s Universities Minister, stated that vice-chancellors need to prioritise pastoral wellbeing and student mental health, in addition to their traditional remit of purely academic education.

“There are some vice-chancellors who think that university is solely about [academic learning] and all of these things are extra that they don’t have to deal with,” he says. “They can’t do that... It can’t be something that belongs to the wellbeing department of the university. This requires sustained and serious leadership from the top.

“We want mental health support for students to be a top priority for the leaders of all our universities,” he added. “Universities should see themselves as ‘in loco parentis’ – not infantilising students, but making sure support





is available where required... it is too easy for students to fall between the cracks and to feel overwhelmed and unknown in their new surroundings."

Tash Crump, president of the Students' Union here at Staffordshire University, has seen first-hand how widespread this issue is, and understands how seriously it needs to be taken by all parties. "A lot of students nowadays tend to experience some kind of problems with their mental health; it's no longer an issue of whether or not you do, but more of to what extent," she says.

This can range from the kind of stress that all students deal with, such as anxiety around exams or deadlines, to much more unique situations.

"We have to do all that we can to help students," she says. "It's upsetting to know that you can't always help, but it's important to let students know they're not in this alone."

October was Mental Health & Wellbeing Month at the Students' Union, with an agenda that included events such as a fundraiser, safer spaces training, and workshops on mindfulness, wellness and time management to help students reduce their stress.

This month-long initiative had the aim of shining a spotlight on the resources that are available to students all year round, so that they know they don't have to suffer in silence: for example, counselling services, and also an advice centre at the Union where students can go if they just need a chat.

"Students get stressed, and if they can't get through to their private tutor, then they often don't know what to do, where they can go, or who they can talk to, and that causes even more problems," says Tash. "The goal of our counselling and advice service is to help students cope, so that ultimately they can stay in university and continue pursuing their degree and their ambitions."

Statistically, male students are the least likely to seek support when they are struggling with their mental health, and suicide is the biggest killer of young men in this country. Eighty-four men take their own lives each week in the United Kingdom; that is one every two hours. It is vitally important, therefore, to break taboos in the traditionally male-dominated space of sport and let guys know that there is help out there and

that there is no shame in reaching out.

"I'm from a sporting background myself, and it is very old-fashioned and male-dominated," says Tash. "A lot of people still think that showing weakness means you are a weak person, which simply isn't true." In order to combat these outdated ideas of "manning up," the Students' Union launched the Ask For Help campaign which centred around getting sportspeople to talk, going into teams, and encouraging athletes to look out for their mates, even if that just takes the form of taking somebody for a drink, a sit down, and a chat.

The Students' Union has also worked closely with men's mental health organisations to co-ordinate fundraising events, including a special Movember colour run where everybody wore fake moustaches. Tash herself recalls wearing her Movember 'tache while playing netball and even while making an appearance on TV. All in the line of duty, she says: "Movember is a really great example of the events we do that are a lot of fun, and raise important awareness for these sorts of issues."

Last year, Staffordshire University partnered with students' unions at 16 other universities to produce an anonymous mental health survey, which enabled them to start seeing what students really think of their services. The results were largely positive; Staffordshire University's students' union had one of the quickest response times when it came to students being able to access counselling.

Tash is proud of all the important work that Staffordshire University has done in this space, but she believes that in the bigger picture, there is always room for improvement.

"I think that ultimately, the most important thing that universities can do is just speak to the students; a lot of the problems in this area arise from a lack of communication," she says. "It's about knowing what the students need and want, rather than just assuming. That's the only way we can ensure that people are getting the help they need to really thrive."

**For more information about the help and support that is available to students at Staffordshire University, visit:**  
[www.staffs.ac.uk/study/disabled/mental\\_wellbeing](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/study/disabled/mental_wellbeing)

# A PLATFORM FOR CREATIVITY

*Moving image cluster Platform is helping put Stoke-on-Trent's digital and creative industries on the map. Founder and Chair Associate Professor Peter Rudge talks about how it is working to drive growth and promote exciting new talent from the region.*

**W**ith a creative history stretching back centuries, Stoke-on-Trent has long been renowned as a region that pushes the artistic boundaries.

From world-famous potters Josiah Wedgwood, the Mason family and Clarice Cliff to the Spitfire designer Reginald Mitchell and even singer Robbie Williams, countless names have helped shape the area's heritage. However, it's a very different art form that is now putting the city firmly on the map.

With Staffordshire University Associate Professor Peter Rudge at the helm, Platform is a moving image cluster that aims to drive the growth of digital industries, be an advocate for local businesses and in turn create a thriving and innovative hub. It was set up specifically to support companies in the film, TV, visual effects, animation, games and immersive technology sectors – in fact, anything that you can class as 'moving image'.

The idea for Platform grew from a number of informal discussions with companies in Stoke-on-Trent and the wider region, which started in 2010. As Peter explains: "There was a feeling that companies were struggling to access finance and be noticed outside the region; and that Stoke-on-Trent was not being recognised as a growing centre for digital media production.

"When I became an Associate Professor at Staffordshire University in 2013, I started a research project to really examine why this was happening and see what could be done about it. I knew about the concept of clusters so felt that by creating a sector-led organisation to support companies to grow, to be an advocate for the city and the region, and to drive growth I could make a real impact on the issues that were holding back the industry."

Peter discovered that despite having more than 100 SMEs working in the digital sector, the region was often overlooked in terms of research and funding. "The UK has the world's third most valuable creative sector, behind the USA and China. In 2016, almost £92 billion was added to the UK's economy thanks to the creative industries. They provide two million jobs and are growing at double the average rate of the whole economy," says Peter. "I recognised that Stoke-on-Trent was very much a young and growing centre for digital creative industries and had an increasingly important role to play in the region's economy, delivering high skill and high value jobs."

The recent reports by government and independent research organisations – most notably the 2017 PWC survey 'UK Economic Outlook March 2017 – back up Peter's passion, all pointing to the digital creative sector as vital to the rebalancing of the economy.

This means that supporting innovation and enterprise frameworks becomes ever more vital as it opens up opportunities across different sectors and industries – and this is where Platform steps in, working in partnership to promote innovation, collaboration, skills and inward investment. And the work Peter and his team have carried out since the launch of Platform 18 months ago has certainly helped the region make a name for itself as a dynamic and growing centre of innovation and development.

"Already our members are seeing recognition of their work, in particular Carse and Waterman, Enlighten and Oscar-winner Rachel Shenton. Reels in Motion were named in the Top 50 Production Companies by leading industry magazine Televisual and Inspired Film were included in the Prolific North top 50 independent production companies."

And it's importance to Staffordshire University? "A lot has been written about the impact and benefits to clusters of working with universities, but the reverse is also true. Platform is seen as a key strategic priority for the University and is contributing to some key





developments on campus. I think this is an incredibly exciting time to be at Staffordshire University – our place in the World University Rankings is just one example of this – and I think you’ll see Platform playing an increasingly important role in how we develop our students, support our alumni and connect with all the communities we serve. Indeed of the recognised companies mentioned above, many are either wholly or partly owned by, or employ Staffordshire graduates. By linking education, government and industry we can attract talent to the region, encourage that talent to stay and then help those start-ups scale, access finance and employ further talent.”

Peter’s role within Platform is as Founder and Chair, he leads the strategic direction of the cluster, along with the Executive Group, and actively promotes member companies and the region to national and international organisations and markets.

“We showcased the cluster to MPs and industry heads at the House of Commons earlier this year and the response I’ve had since has been fantastic. Also, we helped the city be shortlisted for one of the new Channel 4 Creative Hubs. Even though we didn’t make it through, the relationship we have now with Channel 4 is really exciting and can hopefully deliver some lasting benefits for the city.”

Recently named as one of the top 50 leaders in the UK digital and creative industries, Peter’s own career history sees him perfectly placed to practice what he preaches. Having worked in the film and TV industry for nearly 30 years, he learnt his trade in the script and development departments in Hollywood for Universal Studios and Columbia Pictures.

“For me, the highlight of my career so far was being made a member of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts. This is recognition, by your peers, of your contribution to the film and television industry in the UK, so that was very special,” he says proudly. “I was also elected to serve on the Council of the Academy. This was a huge honour, helping to guide the direction of the Academy and overseeing the work of BAFTA around the world. I got to meet some wonderful people, including sharing a dinner with Lord Richard Attenborough.

“I was also part of the producing team on the feature film *Soulboy* that we shot in Stoke-on-Trent in 2008. We worked closely with the University and had the production based at the College Road campus. It was an amazing experience and the cast from the film, Martin Compston, Alfie Allen and Felicity Jones have gone on to do great things.”

So how does Peter see the future of Platform? “250 years ago, Staffordshire was the centre of the ceramics world, a place of cutting-edge technology, business innovation and new manufacturing practice. Josiah Wedgwood, for example, was not just a potter. He was a disrupter, a manufacturing innovator and brilliant designer-creator.

“Platform very much builds on this heritage; it is part of the DNA of innovation and creativity that defines the city and the region. We are remaking that heritage for the 21st century. It’s an ambitious and optimistic vision. The Government’s new Industrial Strategy places clusters at the heart of its plans and for areas like Staffordshire they can really be the engines for regional competitiveness and growth. Platform just wants to continue a proud tradition for the Potteries. We’ve been innovating, creating and disrupting for 250 years – there’s no reason to stop now!”



**“THE HIGHLIGHT OF MY CAREER SO FAR WAS BEING MADE A MEMBER OF THE BRITISH ACADEMY OF FILM AND TELEVISION ARTS”**



*The Stoke-on-Trent contingency showcasing Platform at the Houses of Parliament earlier this year.*

“BE OPEN TO THE THINGS THAT COME YOUR WAY AND SAY YES TO EVERYTHING”

# Three Voices

*Staffordshire University is proud of its alumni and keen to talk about what students go on to achieve after completing their studies. Here, we profile three graduates who are doing great things in a variety of sectors and industries.*



# 1

After graduating with a BA Honours in Fine Art Ben McManus launched Wavemaker, a not-for-profit organisation that teaches people from across Staffordshire valuable digital and personal skills.

**What drives you every day?** Other than paying the mortgage, for me it's about being part of the kind of change I want to see in Stoke-on-Trent. I've lived in the city for 20 years and would like to think I'm playing a small part in making it a better place.

**What does success mean to you?** I guess it means having a positive impact on people's lives in the region. As Wavemaker has moved forward, we have switched from a funding model to a commercial model so I am incredibly proud that we don't have to rely on funding anymore. I think success is about affecting people in a positive way, whether that's giving them access to try something new or simply creating an atmosphere that is supportive.

**What do you do to relax?** I love music and have played in bands for as long as I can remember. One of the reasons I stayed in Stoke after graduating in 2001 was because I was in a band here called Friends of Ken. I am currently in a Pixies' tribute band – Hey Pixies – and I still DJ at Leek Road Students' Union every Friday night.

**What's your career highlight?** I was asked through my old business to complete a feasibility study on behalf of Comic Relief to set up a maker space in Stoke. When we'd presented it we were told we had the money for Wavemaker but they wanted me to run the project. It was the first time someone of that calibre saw something in me I hadn't seen myself.

**Who inspires you?** There's no one person that inspires me; I take inspiration from anyone who enjoys what they are doing and does it with passion. I love passion – I find it very contagious. So it could

be someone facing their own challenge, who has failed, fought through it and tried again until they achieved their goal; or friends who have started their own businesses and achieved great things. Oh, I'm also a massive fan of Burt Reynolds.

**What would you tell your 18 year old self?**

Buy shares in Apple! I would also say don't worry about making mistakes because you'll learn from them. People are too closed off from making mistakes, maybe because of a fear of failure or they think they'll look silly, but I did nothing but make mistakes and have learnt from them all.

**What advice would you give to a new graduate?**

There are a lot more pressures on graduates and many leave with a lot of debt that adds extra stress. So I would say don't worry if you don't know what you want to do with your life. At 21, it's as if you have to have everything sorted. Instead be open to the things that come your way and say yes to everything. Do something that is different to what you graduated in, explore new possibilities and boundaries.

**What's the biggest lesson you've learnt since leaving university?**

I think I have a tendency to trust everyone and think everyone believes the same things as I do so I've learnt not to take it personally when they don't. If you just love doing what you do and have passion for it then everything just comes to you – and I don't mean that in a “hippy, the world will provide for you” way. You can either look at things positively or negatively and it's much better to define yourself by what you love. I was very fortunate that I loved a load of different things.



**“STOP PLANNING WHERE YOU’RE GOING TO BE AT 25 AND LET LIFE TAKE ITS NATURAL COURSE”**

# 2.

Emma Louise Jones hosts the Breakfast Show for Signal 1 and is a presenter on Leeds United TV. She started working in radio and television immediately after graduating from Staffordshire University with a Master’s Degree in Broadcast Journalism.

**What drives you every day?** I wake up and feel excited to go and do the jobs I love. I never get the Sunday blues, because my work genuinely makes me happy. I also strive to step outside of my comfort zone every week, be that in work or in my personal life, so that I’m always learning and moving forward.

**What does success mean to you?** Happiness and freedom; I love that my jobs make me happy as well as giving me the freedom to meet new people and have special experiences.

**What do you do to relax?** I spend time with family and friends, go to the gym and eat good food ... lots of food!

**What’s your career highlight?** Hosting the England V Costa Rica International Friendly for the FA before the lads set off for the World Cup earlier this year. The atmosphere was incredible and it felt amazing to be part of such a special occasion.

**Who inspires you?** I take little bits of inspiration from everyone I work with. I do a variety of radio, TV and live presenting, so I see lots of people with many skills, and I admire them a lot.

**What would you tell your 18 year old self?** It’s all going to fall in to place. Stop planning where you’re going to be at 25 and let life take its natural course because with time, effort and an acceptance that life isn’t always perfect, you’ll find yourself exactly where you belong.

**What advice would you give to a new graduate?** Take advice from those who are already doing what you want to do. Try things to see if you think you might like them (you’ll never know unless you give it a go!) and take something away from each experience.

**What’s the biggest lesson you’ve learnt since leaving university?** Who you are is more important than any academic achievement. Ultimately, you sell yourself because of who you are, and that’s what people will buy in to.

## “BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. SET YOUR AMBITIONS AND MAKE A PLAN BUT DON’T BE AFRAID TO REVIEW YOUR PATH”



**What drives you every day?** Helping clients achieve a fair outcome that allows them and their family to move on with their lives. I’m a hopeless romantic, which some might think is contrary to being a divorce lawyer, but we all make mistakes in life; if a person enters a relationship with all good intention but it turns out to be a wrong decision, for whatever reason, I can help them get out of it with a fair share of the family wealth so they can be free to find love and happiness again.

**What does success mean to you?** It might sound corny, but standing up for my clients’ rights and getting a result which is fair and just. Family law is very much an art rather than a science – there is often no clear cut answer. Extracting relevant information and presenting the case in a way which assists them to achieve their desired result is always a success. In my personal life, it means juggling the responsibilities of my job with the demands of family life. I can’t claim to have mastered that one but if everyone gets where they need to be and there’s a warm home and food on the table, I think it’s a pretty good result.

**What do you do to relax?** Fortunately my husband is not a lawyer so when I get home I can escape my day job. I love spending time with my family out and about in Sheffield; we’re very lucky to live in such a vibrant and friendly city yet have the beauty of the Derbyshire countryside on our doorstep. We have a little puppy and I love taking him on family walks to unwind.

**What’s your career highlight?** Achieving partnership at one of the largest national law firms in the UK was pretty special. It recognised the contribution I’d made to the firm, my standing in the legal community and what I have to offer.

**Who inspires you?** Work-wise, Dame Jennifer Roberts (the Hon Mrs Justice Roberts); I had the opportunity of working with her when she was a practicing QC and admired her calm grace and ability to put clients at ease, translating complex legal issues into simple terms. In my family, my nephew Nathan also inspires me. Despite being born with cerebral palsy and struggling with the physical limitations of his

body, he has levels of determination I’ve never seen in anyone else. He achieved a first class degree, set up a number of successful businesses, lectures around the country on disability issues and is determined to travel the world.

### **What would you tell your 18 year old self?**

Believe in yourself. Set your ambitions and make a plan but don’t be afraid to review your path – there are lots of ways to achieve the same objective. With hard work and determination, anything is achievable. And don’t buy that purple dress when you’re 30, purple doesn’t suit you.

### **What advice would you give to a new graduate?**

Make sure you keep in touch with the people you met during your studies. The friends you make at university will be friends for life. I’ve already sadly lost one good friend who passed away with cancer a few years ago. I’d lost contact with her but she was and still is never far from my mind.

### **What’s the biggest lesson you’ve learnt since leaving university?**

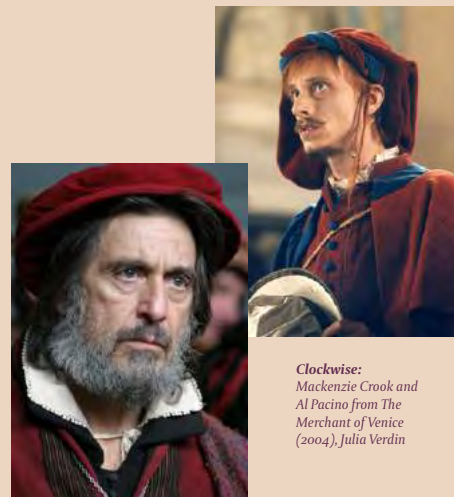
Know when to keep your mouth shut. Growing up is about gaining confidence to speak up when necessary, but it’s also about learning to listen to others and respecting other points of view even if you don’t agree with them.

# 3.

Law graduate Alison Fernandes is partner at Irwin Mitchell solicitors, one of the largest national law firms in the UK, and lives in Sheffield.

# Changing the Film Industry

*From Staffordshire University to Hollywood, Julia Verdin is changing the world, one movie at a time. Horizon spoke to the Hollywood-based producer and Staffordshire University graduate to find out more.*



**Clockwise:**  
Mackenzie Crook and  
Al Pacino from *The Merchant of Venice*  
(2004), Julia Verdin

**J**ulia Verdin is a huge believer in the power of film as a medium — to entertain, but also to provoke and inspire. “What you’re putting out into the world, that’s your legacy,” she says, “and film is a very powerful medium which can influence people enormously.”

After a few decades in Hollywood, she knows what she’s talking about. As the founder of Rough Diamond Productions, Julia has produced more than 30 feature films. She is also a member of BAFTA Los Angeles and a recipient of La Femme International Film Festival’s Executive Achievement Award.

Such an illustrious CV suggests a lifelong ambition to work in movies, but the truth is that Julia’s first love was the written word. “We didn’t have a television in the house until I was 15,” she says, “and so I cultivated a great love of literature, devouring books and living vicariously.” Originally, she was determined to be an actress, and as a teenager, driven by her passion for storytelling, she attended drama school.

While studying English and Drama at the University of London, Julia found that people would approach her for feedback

on their scripts, and she soon became known for giving insightful notes. “What my literary background gave me, and something which I think often gets lost today, is when you read a lot of books, you get an understanding of character and what makes them tick,” she says. “So when I started to read scripts for people, I’d come back with good notes, and eventually people started offering to pay me to do that.”

This led to Julia being given a development role in a production company — and while she kept going to auditions, she found herself enjoying the work more and more. “I knew how to talk to the actors, and I had an understanding of what actors look for in screenplays, the beats they need to play, the full character arc,” she says. One film led to another, and before she knew it she was a fully-fledged producer, making the move to LA in 1991, where the first thing she did was sign up for a line producing course. A line producer is the person who looks after a film’s budget.

“It’s my humble opinion that every producer who wants to make a film from start to finish needs to have a good

understanding of the nuts and bolts aspects, as well as the creative side,” she says. “I wanted to know how a budget is made up, to be able to make educated decisions and hire well, because at the end of the day, as a producer, the buck stops with you. Every movie is its own animal, you need to tailor-make a plan each and every time.”

Over the next 25 years, Julia worked on a broad array of projects, putting her literary credentials to good use on a critically acclaimed screen production of William Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, starring Jeremy Irons and Al Pacino, as well as *2 Jacks*, an adaptation of a Leo Tolstoy short story starring Sienna Miller.

Eventually, a desire to direct led to Julia pursuing a Masters Degree in Film, via Staffordshire University’s partnership with Raindance, which she completed in 2016. “I’m constantly learning, and part of the reason I did the MA was because when I go into something, I want to do it well,” she says, citing TV and film director Bronwen Hughes (*Breaking Bad*, *Teen Wolf*) as a massive inspiration.

“When I worked with Bronwen, she



# DID YOU KNOW?



Of the top 100 grossing films of 2017, women represented...  
 8% of directors, 10% of writers, 2% of cinematographers, 24% of producers, 14% of editors. Source: Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film



The only woman to receive an Academy Award for Best Director...  
 Kathryn Bigelow is the only woman to ever win the Academy Award for Best Director for *The Hurt Locker*.



1. Julia with actor Danny Huston 2. Julia with Jack and Danny Huston 3. Behind the scenes on the set of *Lost Girls* 4. Julia and Jack Huston 5. 2 Jacks DVD cover 6. Kara Bar Paly and Greg Will Brandt on set for *Lost Girls* 7. Julia at the Raindance Film Festival with Michael Madsen and Jane Spencer





**People want to see more diversity in film...**

Films with diverse casts enjoy the highest median global box office and the highest median return on investment. Source: UCLA

had an extraordinary level of technical knowledge," she recalls. "When you're on set and you have a large male crew, you have to be able to command respect. Bronwen knew her stuff, she really understood directing. And so when I decided I wanted to direct, I thought, that's what I want to do. I wanted to give myself those tools and that knowledge. Knowledge is power, after all. The MA was key to me becoming a director."

With 25 years' experience of working closely with directors as a producer, and such a deep love for the medium of film, what took Julia so long to try her hand behind the camera?

"I'd wanted to direct for a long time, but I never thought I could; I never had the courage," she says. "The percentage of women directors in film and TV is really low, it's still traditionally a male-dominated field." She is hopeful, however, that the Time's Up movement, and the current spotlight on Hollywood, will precipitate a sea change in the film industry's gender gap.

"I think there's a lot of work still to be done," she admits, "but most importantly, the conversation has started, and there's more consciousness around the subject now, around the idea that yes, while ultimately the best person should get the job, women should be considered just as much as men for those jobs. What's also helping a lot is that women who are in positions of power are now stepping up and helping to get more women hired. Now it's up to us, as women, to prove that we can pull our own weight, step up to the plate, and show that we can be just as good and hold our own!"

Julia's first project as a director, financed through crowd-funding and her own money, was *Lost Girls*, a short film about child trafficking — a subject she first encountered while volunteering at a children's shelter and subsequently became deeply passionate about. *Lost Girls* won a number of awards at film festivals in 2016, including Best Drama and Best Social Impact. This was to become a pivotal moment in Julia's career, inspiring her to align her experiences from the world of filmmaking with her philanthropic efforts.

"After I made that short, I was asked to speak at a World Bank conference event with NGOs all over the world about filmmaking, and how NGOs could better collaborate with filmmakers, and I realised what a big divide there was between non profits and the filmmaking community," she says. "The non profits have absolutely no idea about how to create media, nor do they have a media budget. At the same time, there are these fantastic filmmakers out there creating short films that might play in a couple of festivals and then get shelved. And I thought, there's got to be a better way to do this."

And so Julia founded Artists For Change, the aim of which is to create media that raises awareness of key social issues, to foster collaboration between filmmaking and the non-profit community, and also to encourage filmmakers to really think about the content they're making.

"As a filmmaker and storyteller, you have a real power over your audience," says Julia. "So are you going to put something out into society that's going to illicit violence and inspire negative emotions in people? Or are you going to put something out there that's going to lift people up and inspire them to be their better selves, move them to care about the environment we live in and see each other as human beings? I think right now we live in a very 'me' culture, and pretty soon we're going to hit a crunch if we don't collaboratively get out of it and become more of a 'we' culture where we look after this planet and each other. We have to start thinking about giving, instead of just grabbing and getting."

The inclusion and representation of groups which don't often get a voice is an important part of Artist For Change's mission statement, and also a factor in the films that Julia chooses to produce. In 2009 she worked on *The Least Among You*, a film based on the true story of a young black man fighting against institutional racism at an all-white seminary in the 1960s; the film was nominated for Outstanding Movie and Best Actor by civil rights group the NAACP at their Image Awards.

## "I'VE ALWAYS BEEN INTERESTED IN SOCIAL MESSAGING, AND HOW THE IDEAS IN A FILM CAN INFLUENCE AND INSPIRE PEOPLE"

"I've always been interested in social messaging, and how the ideas in a film can influence and inspire people," says Julia. This mission will continue with her next project, which also happens to be her first full-length feature. Now in production, *Angie: Lost Girls* will tell another harrowing story of human trafficking and help shine a light on the extent and gravity of the issue. Once production on that has wrapped, Julia is planning to work on a film about honour killings.

Far from being put off by such controversial subject matter, Julia feels it is important to break our silence around what we might consider taboos, and she sees it as her responsibility to make films and tell stories which might spark difficult conversations, but which also serve a common good.

"That's what really interests me, projects that will help instigate change," she says. "I've always tried to have a positive message in all of the films that I've done. In some it's more subtly laid out than others, but a very constant theme is that change is possible, that we can all be what we decide we want to be, and that we can all have the opportunity to be leaders if we just choose to take it."



# NURTURING THE NURSES OF TOMORROW

*State-of-the-art equipment and courses that evolve to cater for the medical needs of today's society ensure Staffordshire University's nursing studies remain in excellent health, according to Dr Ann Ewens.*



Dr Ann Ewens



**I**f Staffordshire University was a human body, Dr Ann Ewens sees nursing studies as a vital part of its central nervous system.

"We're one of the essential nerves running through the body," explains the Dean of the School of Health and Social Care. "Without it, you could carry on but you would be far worse off.

"Of course we could have Staffordshire University without nursing, but it would be a poorer place for it."

It's worth remembering the contribution the University makes to the NHS as we celebrate its 70th anniversary.

There are currently more than 2,000 students studying nursing at Staffordshire University, on degrees in adult and children's nursing, midwifery and mental health nursing.

The courses are constantly evolving and there have been two exciting new developments this year, one which looks to the future and one which put a fresh twist on an old idea.

New skills labs, or clinical simulation suites to give them their full name, have opened at the Stoke-on-Trent campus equipped with cutting edge technology. In a realistic but safe hospital setting, lifelike computerised mannequins breathe, blink and bleed. They react to the treatment they receive and deteriorate if things go wrong.

Another introduction is that of nursing associate apprenticeships. Staffordshire University is leading the way with 20 places on a course which has a nod to the past.

Historically, nurses qualified by doing hospital apprenticeships on the ward. Now

it's a requirement to have a degree and Staffordshire University offers a BSc Nursing Practice (Adult), with half the students' time in lectures and half spent gaining real experience in clinical placements.

But now the University also offers an apprenticeship as another way to get into nursing.

Dr Ewens explains: "We're at the forefront of trails of nursing associates. Apprenticeships are coming back again, though they are not how they were.

"Our nursing associates do a two-year course, spending one day a week with us and the rest on the job. They might be a health-care assistant and would never think of doing a three-year degree, but this is another route into nursing.

"We need to attract a more diverse range of nurses – more mature students, more from lower socio-economic backgrounds and wider ethnic groups, and more men."

Finding new ways to attract nursing students is vital as the population and our healthcare concerns increase.

"People are now living for longer with long-term conditions, and we are seeing sicker people younger," says Dr Ewens, a qualified nurse with 25 years in higher education.

"We have an epidemic in gestational diabetes, because so many young women are significantly overweight. Patients are on treatment for many years when they wouldn't have survived before, but who's going to look after them?"

"There aren't enough nurses and there is a worry that we won't be able to recruit enough. We've had two years of declining applications for nursing degrees across the country, after the introduction of tuition fees.

"At Staffordshire, we're looking creatively at giving opportunities to people who are going to make great nurses. We like to uphold the University's values of being brilliant and friendly, curious and daring.

"Marketing is increasingly important to attract applicants. We run open days and interviews with the attitude that we want people to come here and do well.

"We try to look at applicants holistically and give people a chance to tell us why they would be good candidates. It's not just about looking at their exam results. We want to be as flexible as we can be.

I've met people who have been working as volunteers, or looking after family members with dementia, and I've thought 'You are great, why wouldn't you be a nurse?'"

Dr Marie Lewis is a major success in her field, who credits her Staffordshire University midwifery degree as the foundation for her achievements. She graduated in 1999 and worked as a midwife while completing her Masters and PhD, and is a now a Consultant Midwife at Powys Teaching Health Board.

"Being a health student is very different to being a student in other subjects," says Dr Lewis.

"Instead of attending lecturers on campus and having a hectic social life, we were working on hospital wards and in



clinical practice pretty much full-time. We valued studying and working alongside other trainee medics, ranging from nurses to physiotherapists and doctors.

"Our lecturers helped us develop our critical thinking – our ability to think outside the box, to critique and to look at things through a lens. This gave me the confidence to apply what I was learning to provide the best possible care as a midwife."

The role of nurses has changed considerably over the 70 years of the NHS.

"In the early days they had limited knowledge and responsibility," says Dr Ewens. "It's a really sophisticated, complex profession now.

"Look at mental health nurses, going from working in asylums to being tremendously skilled and dealing with everything from youth suicide to dementia.

"Change has accelerated more in the last few years and nurses have to be prepared to do things differently. People are accessing more health information and we have to work with them to find solutions.

"Nurses have widened the scope of their practice, partly because of a shortage of doctors but also because it's better for the patient that they have more skills. Now we have advanced nurse practitioners who can fully assess patients and prescribe medication.

"Automation is coming and more tasks will be done by machines. But it still takes a well-educated, caring nurse to be able to cope with all our health needs, and that's what Staffordshire University produces."



**“We need to attract a more diverse range of nurses – more mature students, more from lower socio-economic backgrounds and wider ethnic groups, and more men.”**



### **Unique project takes nursing into the community**

An innovative new project is tackling health and social inequality by giving communities a voice.

It is empowering the people who know best how to make their communities better, but often feel that nobody listens. Now communities get a say in where public funding should go – and you can help too.

Staffordshire University has set up the Centre for Health and Development (CHAD), in partnership with Stoke-on-Trent City Council and Staffordshire County Council.

In May 2018, CHAD held its first Big Community Conversation, in which 200 people shared their views on what matters to them.

That led to the Community Action Research Network. Training is given to community champions to help them collect evidence and make a case for where funding should go. They use creative ways to capture people's views, such as video diaries.

Issues tackled range from homelessness, food poverty and childhood obesity to addiction, breastfeeding and diabetes.

If you feel strongly that the circumstances you were born into should not be what defines you, then please consider supporting CHAD's work.

You can lend your research expertise as an Honorary CHAD member or become a CHAD friend by joining the email database, helping to spread the word or donating.

Contact Christopher Gidlow on [C.Gidlow@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:C.Gidlow@staffs.ac.uk) for more information.



*Roller-printing at Spode Works in 1930 courtesy of Spode Museum Trust*



## THE CHANGING FACE OF STAFFORDSHIRE

*Once hundreds of people toiled every day at Spode Works, the factory fortress in the centre of Stoke-on-Trent*

**T**he birthplace of fine bone china, Spode, laid claim to being the longest-running production in the world of the same thing in the same place.

But after 234 years, the pottery business went bust. Some 90 buildings on the nine-acre site lay empty.

And for almost a decade, they remained derelict – but that’s now changing at a rapid rate.

Now thousands of people flock back to Spode, for very different reasons. They gather for music events, watch a play, grab a coffee or meal, stay the night, or work in an artist’s studio.

They could even be Staffordshire University students, enjoying luxury accommodation.

There’s a real buzz about the city with the regeneration of former industrial sites.

Stoke-on-Trent City Council has invested millions and earmarked £32 million more over the next two years. And private investment has helped to make Stoke one of the fastest growing cities in the UK.

Developer Jeff Nash has invested £7 million in turning derelict and unloved

buildings into stylish hives of activity.

He began with Carlton House, a former pottery factory which now boasts high-end student flats.

He also converted an old print works and Stoke Town Methodist Church into student accommodation. Then he moved on to transforming a corner of the Spode Works site, opening a hotel, events space and café.

Elsewhere on the vast Spode site, you’ll find 40 artists’ studios, a free museum and the huge China Hall, now used for exhibitions, charity balls, beer festivals and raves for up to 4,000 people. We also used the venue for our first ever autumn awards ceremonies in November last year and will do so again next November.

Jeff says: “People want to connect with the industrial heritage of Stoke and we give them that opportunity in a cool way.

“These factories are attractive buildings and make good conversions. We keep the heritage feel but turn them into funky spaces – think of the exposed brickwork in the building used in Dragons’ Den.

“Pottery buildings had lots of

windows because the rows of workers needed natural light to paint and hand finish the pots.”

At his Potbank Café, you can sit on the original potters’ stools and admire ceramic designs in the tables. Old canteen furniture found in a skip has been recycled.

Jeff first tackled the former Carlton Ware factory opposite Spode Works.

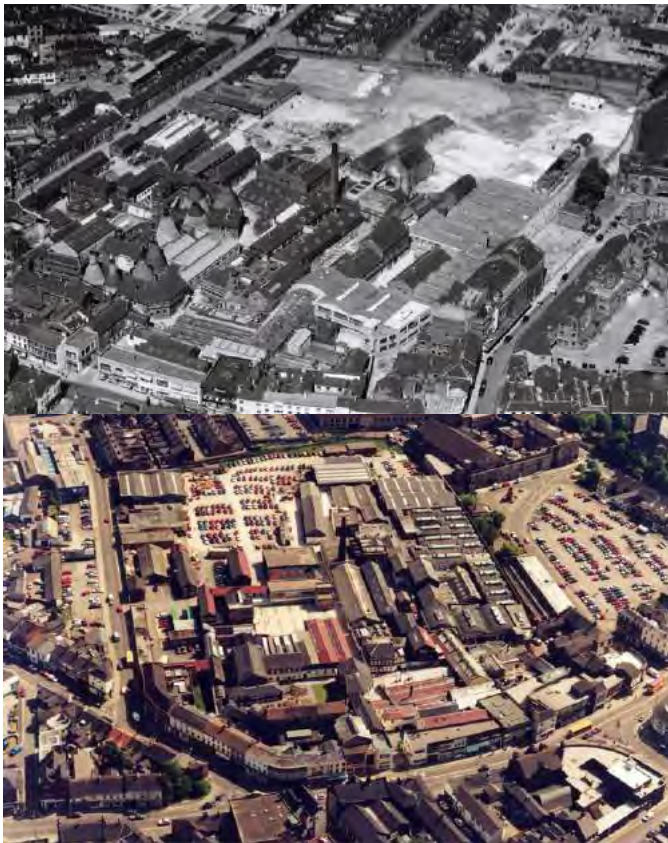
He says: “Carlton House had been converted into student accommodation for Staffordshire University but there were 100 small single study bedrooms, with 12 people sharing a toilet and kitchen.

“We made the spaces twice as big, turning five rooms into two, with en-suites and kitchens shared by four people.

“There’s mixed use on the ground floor, including IT services, a bathroom shop and recruitment agency.”

But Spode Works is Jeff’s real labour of love.

He explains: “The council had bought the site but wasn’t sure what to do with it until we came along. We put in a tender in 2013 and after four years of wrangling over red tape we were granted planning permission.



◇ **1776:** Josiah Spode acquires the site in what is now Church Street, Stoke, and Spode wares are made there continuously until 2008.

◇ **1987:** The Spode Museum Trust is established as an independent charitable trust.

◇ **2009:** The factory closes and the entire collection of fine bone china, pattern books and documents are removed from the site.

“When we started, there were things growing in the buildings, they were full of asbestos and pigeons and they leaked badly.

“We’re just opening the bridal suite in our 26-bedroom Potbank hotel, which has a rooftop conservatory and large space with vaulted ceilings that’s great for events, training days and weddings.

“We’ve held three weddings here already, with 35 more booked in for next year. We also let space to a video production company called Popcorn.

“Still to come next year is the development of the loading bay area. The ramp lends itself well to a stage where we’ll hold music festivals for up to 1,000 people.

“Potbank Café opened a year ago and has become a real social hub for Stoke. It’s a meeting place for students, artists and people from the new industries, such as graduate bio-tech start-ups. There are a lot of new businesses in

Stoke, its economy is on the up.”

Potbank Café has just played host as the pre and post-theatre venue for a play performed at the former Spode warehouse next door.

*Hot Lane* is the latest play by former *Coronation Street* star Deborah McAndrew who the University made an Honorary Doctor of Arts last year. A sequel to last year’s sell-out *Dirty Laundry*, it’s a tale of passion set in 1950s Stoke.

Deborah, who played Angie Freeman in the soap, set up Claybody Theatre Company in 2013 with the aim of bringing high quality live drama and plays of local relevance to non-theatre, iconic spaces in the Potteries. She’s an award-winning playwright and a former guest lecturer at Staffordshire University.

Spode Works is the last remaining heritage pottery site to be redeveloped in the city.

Most of the factories which closed

down in the 1970s and 80s have been knocked down. But there is a resurgence in the ceramics industries in Stoke.

Wedgwood and Portmeirion still produce here in modern factories. The Emma Bridgewater factory handcrafts 1.3 million pieces a year in a traditional Victorian pot bank in Hanley.

Middleport Pottery is still partly in use as the home of Burreigh Pottery and you can tour the factory to see pieces made using the same handcrafted methods as in the 1880s. It’s also home to artists’ studios and shops and is a film and TV location, famous as the site of BBC2’s *Great Pottery Throwdown* and a location for the fifth series of the hit BBC drama *Peaky Blinders*.

“If someone who graduated from Staffordshire University 10 or even five years ago was to return to Stoke-on-Trent today, they would certainly see a difference, but they would feel one too,” says Nicola Grafton, the





*Left page: Spode Works in 1952 and 1995, Spode Entrance Gates all images courtesy of Spode Museum Trust. This page: Modern day conversion of Spode Works used as an events space, Church Street artist studios images courtesy of Acava Spode Works.*

◆ **2012:** Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Stoke on Trent City Council, the Spode Museum Trust sets up a small Visitor Centre on the Spode site.

◆ **2018:** Spode Works and the adjoining King's Hall are the venues for Staffordshire University's Autumn Graduation.

Lead for Cultural and Connected Community Engagement at Staffordshire University.

"Physically the city has changed but perhaps more importantly, the outlook of people has changed too. We still face huge issues but I feel there's real momentum behind regeneration, especially in the arts and culture sector.

"There has always been lots of creative activity, but now it's more co-ordinated as people have started connecting. By working together, we can have bigger aspirations for our city."

Nicola was part of Stoke-on-Trent's bid to become UK City of Culture in 2021, in which it lost out to Coventry.

She says: "Working on the bid was an eye-opener about the will of local people to make things happen. The momentum behind arts and culture in the city was like a steam train. People who were once sceptical about our future have now bought into it.

"The University is developing partnerships to help regeneration. We work closely with the city council and with Keele University, for example on the Stoking Curiosity Festival. Held at Spode Works, it aims to spark ideas and make research engaging to non-academics."

Councillor Daniel Jellyman, Stoke-on-Trent City Council's cabinet member of regeneration, says: "Joseph Spode built his house and factory in 1774 and the town grew around the huge site. Spode Works is built like a fortress to keep people out, with only one entrance, and one of the challenges is opening up this hotchpotch of buildings to make it part of the town.

"Some of the artists' studios now have a shop front onto the high street. They are really popular and there are plans to develop around 20 more. You'll find photographers, woodworkers, a website designer and a painter, but they're not just for artists as they

make great units for small start-up businesses.

"New businesses are moving here almost every day, to take advantage of cheap rents, business rates and living costs. You're surrounded by beautiful Staffordshire countryside and you can get to London in just an hour and 20 minutes by train, the same time as from Birmingham. No wonder Stoke train station is now busier than Crewe.

"Spode's China Hall is the biggest space outside London currently not being used full-time. They've held everything from raves to motorbike shows there, but we want to put modern technology in and use it for conferences and a wider range of events.

"There's also a development company looking to build another hotel and student accommodation on what was the factory car park.

"There's a real feeling of optimism, aspiration and resurgence in the city. It's an exciting time."

# How Vietnam partnership is changing lives

*Jed Clarke spent a year at the British University Vietnam, taking in world-famous sights and broadening his academic horizons. His story is one of many examples of Staffordshire University's ever-expanding international reach.*



Photo by Minh Minh, Unsplash



**A** Staffordshire University student who spent a year at the British University Vietnam (BUV) has described how the experience was life-changing.

Jed Clarke enrolled on a BA (Hons) degree in Accounting and Finance and graduated at the British University Vietnam, in Hanoi, which delivers Staffordshire University degrees in business, finance and accounting,

tourism and events, computing and creative practice. BUV has an internationalised staff team supported by staff at Staffordshire University.

Jed described his learning and cultural experiences in Vietnam, and how he has become a more confident person, achieving several life goals.

"In September 2014 I started the biggest journey of my life so far," he says.

"This consisted of two years' study at Staffordshire University, followed by a great opportunity to get some quality work experience in my chosen field on a Finance Placement with the Staffordshire University finance team. I was then offered the chance to study my final year at British University Vietnam, based in Hanoi and boy have I enjoyed every minute of it.

"The degree with Staffordshire has helped me to develop general skills that range from organisation to team work, industry-related skills such as budgeting and reconciliations, industry-related experience with the placement and the opportunity to experience a new culture and lifestyle while studying and working in one of the fastest emerging economies in the world."

BUV moved to its new \$70 million (USD) Ecopark campus in September 2018. This state-of-the-art modern campus provides an outstanding learning and teaching environment for Staffordshire University students.

Jed is staying in Vietnam for at least another year before considering his long-term options.

He is planning to complete an MBA while working as a teacher at BUV, before moving into the finance industry, hopefully as a management accountant.

"All of this would not have been made possible without the guidance and support from Staffordshire University," Jed explains.

"With it I have become more confident, achieving my personal

**My personal experience has been one I will cherish for the rest of my life, going down as one of the best decisions I will ever make**

goal of setting out to become a different person than who I was when I started.

"My personal experience has been one I will cherish for the rest of my life, going down as one of the best decisions I will ever make, as well as being able to graduate with a 1st class honours degree."

Professor Ieuan Ellis, Pro Vice-Chancellor at Staffordshire University, has been in regular contact with Jed and attended his graduation in Hanoi. He said Staffordshire University is looking to encourage more students to follow a similar path to Jed.

"The BA (Hons) Accounting & Finance programme Jed has been following in Hanoi is exactly the same award we deliver in Staffordshire," explained Professor Ellis.

"This means potential students like Jed can carry out the first couple of years of study in the UK and then consider studying the final year in the partner institution.

"It works the other way in that we also want to see more of the students who are studying for Staffordshire degrees with our partner universities overseas being able to spend the final year of their degree studying on our main UK campus.

"One of the hurdles to doing what Jed has done is the financial barrier. We know there's a cost for flights but, that said, once students are in Vietnam the cost of living is considerably lower than in the UK.

"Through our Horizon Fund we're hoping to create bursaries for travel purposes which will support students who want to take up opportunities to study with an overseas partner or for educational visits as part of their degree.

"We want to focus this on partners like BUV because we know that if we can help students towards meeting the cost of the air fare, then they will receive

excellent support once they arrive in the country.

"Jed has been warmly embraced and welcomed by staff and fellow students and has built connections with the British Embassy to help this.

"The British Ambassador personally name-checked Jed during his graduation ceremony and said how great it was to work with him. That shows the impression he has made in the short period of time he has been in Vietnam.

"While we could support students to go anywhere in the world, when we know we have a partner organisation that offers the same degree they're studying here with excellent support networks, that is something we want to particularly encourage."



**READ MORE ABOUT JED'S AMAZING TIME IN VIETNAM OVER THE PAGE**

# World-famous sights and lots of new friends... Jed's student life in pictures

*From popular tourist spots to hidden gems unknown by foreign visitors, Jed Clarke has visited some of the most spectacular sites in South East Asia during his time in Vietnam. He shares some of the highlights with Horizon magazine.*

**D**uring my time in Vietnam I travelled to Sapa and got a cable car to Fansipan, the highest peak in Vietnam at 3,143 metres high. The scenery was amazing and unlike anything I'd seen before, but the real beauty of this town was the people. They had their own identity, different to what I was used to in the city of Hanoi. They dressed in bright clothing and the females always had their hair covered with either a hat or scarf. I also noticed they had a very good level of English, possibly because of the large number of tourists this town gets.

I also travelled to Thai Nguyen, a relatively unknown area of Vietnam for tourists and was again amazed by what I saw. My group journeyed up into the mountains and were able to do some waterfall jumping. We were greeted by all the Vietnamese there, most would say hello and wave as they drove or walked past, whilst others would stop and ask for photos. These people had very little but were still so happy, especially compared to the wealthy elite in Hanoi.

I made many friends in my time whilst here, some students and others outside of BU.V. One of my highlights of Vietnam was joining in the national celebrations with people taking to the streets after their U23s football team lost in the final of the AFC Asian cup. A few months later and these same people were there beside me cheering whilst watching England progress in the FIFA World Cup.

Vietnam is very different to the UK, the

culture here is different, the food, the scenery. It's very refreshing to see all the youngsters brought up to treat their elders with respect, even their language requires different words when greeting someone who is older. All parents encourage their children to study a degree, and females tend not to leave their family homes until they are married. The food here is traditional with a wide variety of flavours, and in Hanoi there are many famous tourist hotspots such as the Temple of Literature (first university in Vietnam), the Red Bridge, Hoan Kiem Lake, the Old Quarter and the Imperial Citadel. Once you leave the city there is lots of green, some areas untouched and it really is nature at its finest.

For me the language barrier has been a little tough but many people in the city of Hanoi know some English, and I

was able to learn enough Vietnamese to get me through the year. The weather here is different too, it is still 30 degrees in November but drops to around 15 degrees by December. The winter here in Hanoi is very short and only lasts a few months before the temperature starts to increase, the summer has highs of 40+ degrees. The heat can be very difficult to get used to at first but you soon climatise.

When I first applied for my degree in 2014 I never imagined I'd experience what I have in my four years as a Staffordshire student. I always wanted to study abroad but I had always thought it was impossible - but Staffordshire University and their partner British University Vietnam made this dream a reality. If I had the chance I would do it all over again and wouldn't change a second.



Halong Bay, Vietnam



At Fansipan, the highest peak in Vietnam, which is in Sapa



The Temple of Literature in Hanoi



The Imperial Citadel in Hanoi. This was made a UNESCO world heritage site in 2010 that houses many historical and cultural artefacts and items dating from between the 6th and 20th centuries



Street market in Vietnam



## Staffordshire graduates celebrate in Malaysia

Staffordshire University students took centre stage at DISTED College's 27th Convocation Ceremony, which was held at a hotel in the Malaysian state of Penang. The event saw students being recognised with their diplomas and degrees in various disciplines.

DISTED College is a renowned non-profit institution in Penang owned by the Wawasan Education Foundation, which began its educational partnership with Staffordshire University in 1997. The partnership has grown enabling DISTED to offer a range of Staffordshire University approved business undergraduate awards.

The DISTED ceremony saw 149 graduates receiving their degree from Staffordshire University. This year's cohort of Staffordshire graduates produced its biggest group of First Class Honours graduates, after 18 students received the prestigious accolade. It is the first time the DISTED – Staffordshire partnership achieved such a feat and graduates and lecturers expressed their delight with the achievement.

The ceremony was officiated by the Chair of DISTED's Board of Directors, Dato Seri Stephen Yeap. He was joined by members of DISTED's Board of Directors and Professor Ieuan Ellis, Pro Vice Chancellor for Partnerships and Region, representing Staffordshire University.

# The latest from Staffordshire University

## Rare bat species discovered during Catalyst Building surveys

A protected bat species has been discovered on the site of Staffordshire University's planned £40m Catalyst building.

The finding, made by ecologists during surveys of the Brindley building, has delayed demolition as bats are in their hibernation period and cannot be disturbed. This is expected to extend the creation of the new Catalyst Building to Autumn 2021.

Staffordshire University's Catalyst Building, which is part-funded by the Office for Students, will take the place of the Brindley Building and will become a flagship for students and the local community.

The building will house the Apprenticeships & Digital Skills Hub, a new library, social learning spaces and a restaurant and café. It will also act as a study base for 6,500 new apprentices by 2030.

The discovery of a bat roost means that additional exploratory work will take place in the summer. All 18 British bat species are protected by law.

The species is believed to be a Whiskered Bat, protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981. Whiskered Bats have more fur around their eyes and muzzle than other bats and, comfortable near human habitation, they can be found in woodland, towns and cities.

This highlights that the Stoke campus of Staffordshire University is clearly a haven for wildlife in the city.

Dr David Skingsley, Senior Lecturer in the School of Life Sciences and Education and a recognised wildlife expert, said the find was a great opportunity: "Discoveries like this show how green spaces, and the buildings around them, contribute to the environmental well-being of the places in which they are sited. Winter roosts, like those newly discovered in our University building, indicate that wildlife is using green spaces, like our community nature reserve, to survive and flourish."

The University will be working to enhance the wildlife habitats on campus and the new Catalyst Building will feature environmentally friendly features such as solar power.





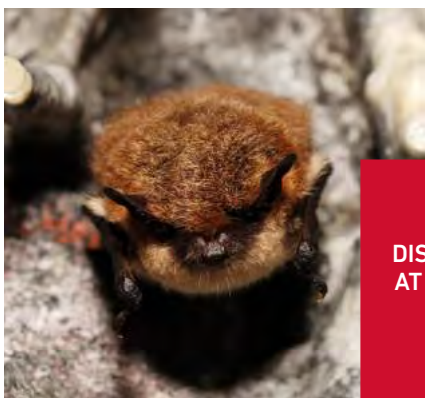
## Staffordshire University climbs six places in Good University Guide

The rise to 57th in The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2019 follows a significant increase of 29 places last year. Staffordshire University was identified among the top ten universities for teaching quality for the second year running, climbing to number nine, and also came 22 out of 131 in the social inclusion rankings.

The University achieved its highest ever position of 44th in the Guardian league tables earlier this year; the latest announcement helps the University towards its target of being a Top 50 University in the UK's league tables.

Staffordshire is also celebrating a breakthrough to the 2019 Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Liz Barnes said: "We've had a hugely successful year in league table performance which are all positive indicators that our Connected University strategy is helping us to deliver great courses, teaching and student experience as well as impactful research which benefits our communities and transforms lives."



**NEW  
DISCOVERY  
AT STAFFS**

Image by Sue Godfrey



## Pioneering music video director awarded honorary doctorate

Celebrated musician Kevin Godley has had bestowed upon him the Award of Honorary Doctor of Arts of Staffordshire University in recognition of his pioneering work in music video production and the conception of early music videos in the 1970s and 80s.

Kevin, the drummer for rock band 10cc as well as a music video director, has worked with U2, The Beatles, Lou Reed and The Police, among many others.

His illustrious career was the main feature within, and his image appeared as the cover image on, the last edition of Horizon magazine.

Kevin is also a graduate of the Stoke-on-Trent Regional College of Art, one of three colleges that merged in 1971 to form North Staffordshire Polytechnic, later renamed Staffordshire University. He lived in Hanley from 1966 to 1968 while studying graphic design during the day and playing drums with R&B group The Mockingbirds at night.

After leaving college, he joined Hotlegs, a short-lived band best known for its number two UK hit single *Neanderthal Man* in 1970. In 1972 he formed 10cc with Graham Gouldman, Eric Stewart and Lol Creme. Over the next four years, he would go on to have nine hit singles and four hit albums with the band, before leaving in 1976 with Lol Creme. The pair had several hit records under the name Godley & Creme and, eventually, turned their hands to music video directing.

Kevin's early adoption and innovative approach ensured he became a sought-after director, working with musicians and bands such as Paul McCartney, Alabama 3 and, more recently, The Charlatans, Keane, Snow Patrol, Katie Melua and Elbow.

Kevin worked on the BBC2 One World One Voice world music special, which raised awareness of environmental issues. He created a 'chain tape' for One World One Voice which was sent to various studios around the world where local artists contributed to it.

He said: "The award of Honorary Doctor of Arts came as a total surprise and is extraordinary. Frankly, I am honoured and I would certainly hope to reconnect with the University and work together in the future."



IN SUPPORT  
OF LGBTQ+



### New Esports degree launches

Staffordshire University unveiled its specialist Esports Hub to train the next generation of managers, commentators and broadcasters with the UK's first esports degree.

The hub features state-of-the-art technology and will allow students to host and broadcast live esports events. Kit includes 12 gaming workstations with Razer mice and headphones, broadcast cameras and a broadcast gallery, specialist lighting, a studio area for three presenters and two commentators, plus spectator seating.

Course lecturer Stuart Kusters said: "The hub will be a place where students can learn in a real-life setting and understand what goes on behind-the-scenes of a major esports event.

"We have been working closely with industry employers who believe that this hands-on experience is vital. We want to put our students ahead of the game when they graduate and give them the best chance of getting a job."

The BA (Hons) Esports degree has been developed with help from the biggest names in industry and has attracted worldwide interest and applications.

The course focuses on the business of esports and students will be able to undertake a number of exciting placement opportunities with companies including Red Bull and at national gaming events like Insomnia.

Meanwhile, a new study carried out by Staffordshire University shows how esports empowers young people. More than 2,000 pupils participated in the study which was carried out by academics at Staffordshire University. The research set out to determine the effects of taking part in the Digital Schoolhouse Esports Tournament 2018.

#### FINDINGS SHOWED THAT...

**82** per cent of players said they were more likely to participate in other team sports, as a result of taking part in the tournament

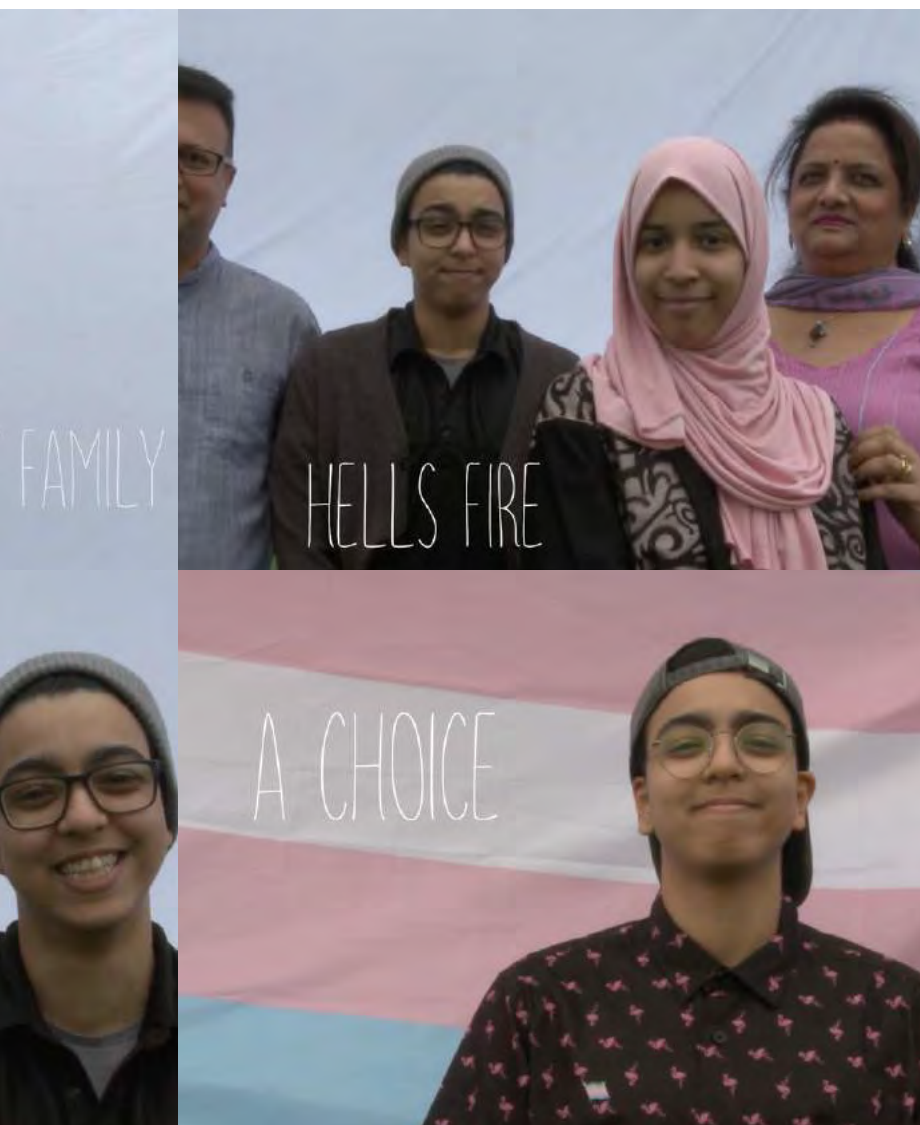
**94** per cent said that taking part made them more interested in computers/computing subjects

**88** per cent said that taking part in the tournament made them more interested in a career in the video games industry

Richard with villagers in Bepal







## Staffs flies flag for the LGBTQ+ community at film festival

The Shropshire Rainbow Film Festival took place in October 2018 and screened films from across the world at the Old Market Hall in Shrewsbury.

BA (Hons) Film, Television and Radio student Chelsie Yates was one of only nine filmmakers selected to show their work in the short film programme.

She said: "It was really overwhelming when I found out that my film had been picked for the festival. I had to tell everyone!"

"To think that this is only the second film I've made is crazy. Being on the course has made me realise that I can achieve a lot more than I thought."

Chosen from more than 200 entries, *Polaroid People* was made during Chelsie's first year on her degree. The two-minute film explores the challenges that arise for a young Muslim trans boy trying to embrace his true identity without losing his family and religion.

Inspired by a close friend, who plays himself, Chelsie shot the film with a course mate and her brother in her hometown of Northampton.

"I wanted to make a film about something close to my heart. My friend Isaac is transitioning from female to male and I wanted people to understand what it is like." Chelsie explained.

"Because he is Muslim it focuses on the religious aspect as well. It is an extremely hard thing for people to go through. Isaac's mother rejected him, and he lost a lot of friends."

Chelsie has just started her second year at Staffordshire University and attended the screening of her film with her mum and her auntie who is also transgender.

A registered charity, the festival relies on donations and is organised by volunteers including Staffordshire University film lecturers Rachel Smith and Amy Hill.

## Graduate and humanitarian aid worker receives the Vice-Chancellor's Graduating Student Award 2018

Richard Bretherick, 49, originally from Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, studied the MA International Policy and Diplomacy degree by distance learning while working as South Sudan Country Director for The MENTOR Initiative, a non-governmental organisation which works to fight tropical diseases like malaria.

Richard returned to his native West Yorkshire in August and has since taken up a position with The MENTOR Initiative as an Emergency Response Officer.

This involves studying disease epidemics and tailoring a response which is then offered to the host government. His next assignment is to spend time in Cameroon to carry out an assessment of needs and consider how to address malaria in the far north of the country.

Richard was one of six students shortlisted to receive

the Vice-Chancellor's annual award, which is announced each year during the summer graduation ceremonies.

He said: "My initial feeling when nominated was one of some amazement. Now that I have won the award, I am still somewhat overwhelmed."

Richard has lived, studied and worked in several countries over the last 20 years including Indonesia, Australia, Turkey, Central African Republic, Afghanistan and South Sudan. Due to work commitments, he was unable to accept his award in person, so his father Jack collected it on his behalf during graduation week.

Announcing the Graduating Student Award, Vice-Chancellor Professor Liz Barnes said: "Richard is a fine example of how our University connects across the world – studying in South Sudan while undertaking massive challenges in his work and life. Like so many of our students he has overcome adversity and achieved great things, also sharing his learning with his peer group and staff."

# Create a better tomorrow for our students

**J**oin fellow alumni and friends, who through their generous support have transformed the lives of our students.

Your gifts of money and time will help students realise their potential and become the best they can be – preparing them to become graduates who make a real difference in society and the world.

They will:

- Take away financial pressures, remove barriers to higher education and open up a world of life enhancing opportunities.
- Offer our students an incredible university experience in their studies and in their lives; from the lecture theatre, to the lab, to the sports field.

The Horizon Fund has been created to assist as many students as possible in challenging times, to progress and excel. Donations to the fund provide additional financial support for our students through:

- Bursaries for our high-achieving but financially poorer students, typically these may be students from disadvantaged backgrounds or often the first in their family to go to university.
- Scholarships are awarded to our top performing students. Donations enable us to provide scholarships to reward academic achievement and excellence.
- Life chances awards allow students to seize the day, explore the globe, secure their dream job and strive to do more than they ever thought possible.



Life Chances award recipients Lorraine and Ryan tell their stories of how the Horizon Fund has given them unique opportunities.



Music Technology student Lorraine Lionheart, from Botswana, is a rising star in world music. Her study goal was to further her career by improving her visibility in the music industry.

“I need to ensure my music is heard by promoters, so by the time I have finished I will have a better chance of securing bigger shows,” she says.

Lorraine took advantage of the Staffordshire University Life Chances award, which gave her the opportunity to travel to Lagos in Nigeria and to perform at Felabration – one of Africa’s biggest music festivals, featuring performances from Stevie Wonder and Alicia Keys.

“The Life Chances award enabled me to travel to the festival and to get more than 20 interviews with global media,” added Lorraine.

“I achieved so much with the Staffordshire University award and I will be forever grateful. Being part of the University is one of the best decisions I ever made.”



Two job offers came to Computer Networks and Security student Ryan Tomlinson for his placement year but prohibitively expensive travel costs kept him from exploring both. World renowned computing firm HP, based in rural Bracknell, and global leader in financial technology Options, in central London, were both vying for Ryan’s acceptance letter.

Train tickets to the nation’s capital proved too expensive, however, until the Development and Alumni Relations Office provided a Life Chances award with only a day’s notice.

“I could never have visited the Options office and met the people working here if it wasn’t for the award, now a Network Administrator at Options. I got offered both jobs and, thanks to the bursary, I could make my own decision. I definitely made the right choice.”

## How you can help

You can contribute financially by making a regular monthly donation, a one-off payment, or by leaving a legacy gift.

To make a financial gift please complete the donation form insert in your magazine pack and send it to the Development and Alumni Relations Office or visit [www.staffs.ac.uk/donate](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/donate). Your time and expertise are extremely valuable to the University. Our students benefit greatly from the work placements, internships, mentoring and guest lectures offered by our alumni.

For more information or to talk to us about a legacy gift or the offer of a gift of time, please call the Development and Alumni Relations team on 01782 295702 or email [developmentoffice@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:developmentoffice@staffs.ac.uk)



### NEW BURSARIES TO PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING IN STAFFORDSHIRE

Staffordshire University has announced a new bursary scheme supported by Kirsty and Ernesto Bertarelli. The grants are designed to give students from non-traditional backgrounds the best chance of transforming their futures.

The Bertarelli Bursaries will initially be made to 33 students for the full three-year duration of their course. Each bursary recipient will receive a cash sum of £1,500 a year, subject to their satisfactory progression through their course. A further 33 bursaries will be awarded in 2020 and 2021.

The aim is to boost retention and progression of students who have completed the University’s Step Up to HE course. Eligible students also include those living within a 30-mile radius of the University’s campuses and who have successfully completed an Access to HE course at local colleges.

Kirsty was made an Honorary Doctor of Arts by Staffordshire University in 2016 in recognition of her philanthropic work.



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\*44th of 121 UK institutions in the Guardian League Tables 2019



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