

Village Green

Aston leads the way
with new 'green' student
accommodation

AQEX
Issue 22 Spring 2009



Where
are they
now?

30 year
reunion for
cancer drug team

How to beat the
credit crunch

Welcome...

To our new look issue of Apex. After a year of being away, I hope you are as pleased to see it as we are to have it!

I am thrilled to join Aston University as the new Alumni Relations Officer. I joined the team in December after spending the last nine years working in higher education. I look forward to being in touch with many of you and hopefully meeting you at gatherings and reunions in the future.

In this issue you can find out how two recent male graduates are taking on the baby market (page 8), what the students of tomorrow can expect on campus with the new Halls of Residence (page 16) and find out what graduates from your year are up to now in the popular ‘Where are they now?’ section (page 22). I hope you enjoy the magazine, and please let us know if you have any suggestions or feedback.

Keep in touch!

Carol
Carol Marsh
Alumni Relations Officer



Message from the Vice-Chancellor

Dear Alumni and Friends

I am delighted to welcome you to the newly launched Apex magazine. We’ve made a number of changes that we think will improve its appeal to our alumni and to others with whom we’d like to keep in close contact.

I’m especially proud of our lead article on the Aston Student Village project. This is one of the most significant building schemes ever undertaken at Aston. It will be a huge improvement in terms of our ability to offer quality student accommodation on campus. For those of you who remember Dalton, Lawrence, or Stafford Towers, we think you’ll be interested to hear what future Aston students can look forward to!

These are exciting times for Aston as we continue to grow in influence and prestige. As an alumna or an alumnus, I’m sure you’ll be proud to know that we were shortlisted for The Sunday Times University of the Year and that we are ranked 18th in this year’s Guardian Good University Guide. We also rank 11th in the National Students’ Survey out of all mainstream universities, with an overall satisfaction score of 89%.

Please enjoy this issue of Apex and tell us what you think.

Best wishes,

Julia King, CBE FREng
Vice-Chancellor

Contact us

Get in touch and let us know what you are up to now. You might be featured in the next issue of Apex in the autumn. We can also help promote any reunions you might be holding to fellow alumni. Getting in contact is easy – email us at alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk, call the office on +44 (0)121 204 4239 or send us a letter at Development & Alumni Relations Office, SW 408, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham B7 4ET.

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Special thanks go to everyone who contributed to this issue of Apex. Apex is published twice a year for alumni and friends of Aston University. Letters, photographs and news are very welcome but we reserve the right to edit any contributions. Please address all correspondence to the Development & Alumni Relations Office. The opinions expressed in Apex are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of Aston University.

Designed by Eleven
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Page 2, 9, 10, 14, 16 – Edward Moss
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Page 6, 14 – Huw Meredith



Have you heard about our international placement programme yet?

Professional placements are an integral part of Aston Business School undergraduate degrees. Our international placement programme provides third year students with 12 or six month internships in various locations worldwide. If you are an employer interested in being part of this, we would like to hear from you!

The programme has proven to be very attractive to many employers who year-on-year benefit from high calibre ABS students in a cost effective way. Placements take place in various business functions including Marketing, Communications, Operations, Finance, Human Resources and Accounting. Many placement students are also fluent in foreign languages.



To request a brochure or to participate in the programme please contact us at internationalplacement@aston.ac.uk or +44 (0)121 204 3211

Word up

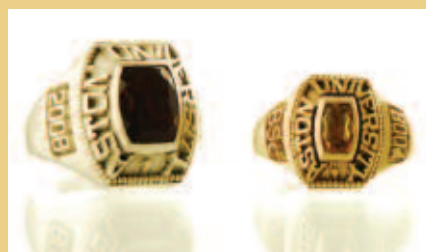
Aston's School of Languages & Social Sciences hosted The National Network for Translation's Careers Day in June 2008. Professor Christina Schäffner, Director of Translation, and her team organised a full programme for young people interested in translation as a career. The morning programme explored what it was really like to work as a translator, with first hand experience recounted by Aston's alumni who work in areas as diverse as marketing for Google, freelance translating, and international banking. Erato Schmidt (2007, MA Translation in a European Context), Rebecca Smith (2007, MA Translation in a European Context), Michael Schmid (2005, MA Translation in a European Context) and Tim Bayton (2002, BSc Modern Languages and Translation Studies) came back to campus to talk about their individual careers as translators. The afternoon was a hands-on session in the language labs. Budding translators and interpreters had the chance to put their skills to the test and get a real taster of what it's like working as a translator or interpreter.

Aston ring

Mark your degree and graduation with an elegant and bespoke graduation ring in solid silver or gold. Choose between a traditional signet ring featuring the University crest or an Imperial ring with a choice of precious stone and personalised to your degree and achievements: feature your degree initials, year of graduation and an engraving of your choice.



To order and for more information please visit www.evalondon.com/aston



Aston scientists create living models to study the human brain

Researchers in the School of Life & Health Sciences are developing a novel new way to model how the human brain works by creating a living representation of the brain. They are using cells originally from a tumour which have been 'reprogrammed' to stop multiplying. Using the same natural molecule as the body to stimulate cellular development, the cells are turned into a co-culture of nerve cells and astrocytes – the most basic units of the human brain. These co-cultures can be developed into tiny, connected balls of cells called neurospheres which can process information, which at a very simple level, is the basis of thought.

The research process does not require animal testing and since 2007 has been generously supported by the Humane Research Trust. In the future, the tiny three-dimensional cell clusters, which are essentially very small models of the human nervous system, could be used to develop new treatments for diseases including Alzheimer's, Motor Neurone and Parkinson's Disease. These progressive and debilitating neurodegenerative conditions are becoming more common as the population of the UK ages.

Professor Michael Coleman, who is leading the research team, said, "We are aiming to be able to study the human brain at the most basic level, using an actual living human cellular system. Cells have to be alive and operating efficiently to enable us to really understand how the brain works. In the longer term we hope that our procedure can be used to help us understand how conditions such as Alzheimer's and other neurodegenerative diseases develop. At the moment, most people are only too aware that current treatments for these conditions do not halt their progress and often have side-effects. We hope that our technique will provide scientists with a new and highly relevant human experimental model to help us understand the brain better and develop new drugs and treatments to tackle neurodegenerative disease."

Are you socially networked?

Come and join the increasing number of alumni on social networking sites and keep in touch with fellow graduates. Over 1,600 graduates are on Facebook.com. You can also find over 900 members on the business-orientated social networking site LinkedIn.com.



To find the group search for Aston University.

Give us your email and help the environment

Alumni events and activities are being organised all around the world, as well as receiving more requests asking us to help people get in touch with lost friends.



Help us cut down on our paper usage by sending your email address to: alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk

Aston's alumni website is changing

Listed among the top inventions that shaped world history are the printing press, the telephone and the internet. They all revolutionised the way we communicate but only one of them enabled multiple communications – the internet. It's a powerful tool and an easy way to maintain your involvement with Aston University and your peers.

Aston's alumni website will be changing this summer. Online newsletters, event calendars, email forwarding, new ways to find lost friends and much more will make it easier for you to get and stay in touch.

We'll be sending out regular updates as the launch approaches so make sure you have given us your email so you don't miss out! Look out for updates in your inbox!



Congratulations to all new graduates

A sunny day on the 31st March saw 480 graduands attend their graduation ceremonies in the splendid surroundings of Birmingham Town Hall. Degree Congregations are a time for celebration and pride and the ceremonies were attended by family, friends and academic staff. Buffet receptions were held back on campus following the ceremonies. The Development & Alumni Relations Office would like to congratulate all those who graduated in March.

Graduate meets alumni all over the world



Alumnus Peter Thong (1970 BSc Production Engineering), makes good use of the services offered by the Alumni Office by arranging meetings with like minded graduates all over the world. With business trips planned, the 1970s graduate contacted the office saying that he would like to meet with other graduates whilst he was away.

A few months later and Peter, who is based in Beijing, had met with 2004 graduate Kamran Saddique and Salman Sajjad in Dubai. He then travelled to Shanghai and met with Tony Jiang. They both agreed that Aston alumni in Beijing and Shanghai will benefit from networking with each other and are putting steps in place to make this possible.

Peter said, “We Aston alumni will do well to meet and share our personal world of experience, knowledge and connections. We walk into each other’s world then.”

Peter’s travels also took him to Malaysia where he met Ooi Soo Gin in Penang and Datuk Ir. Mohamed Al Amin Abdul Majid, Ir. Aw Ngiong Hwa, Muhtar Hashim, Peter Lim Kien Lai and Thong Kok Sing in Kuala Lumpur.

If you are planning a trip abroad why not contact fellow alumni through the e-groups or through the Development & Alumni Relations Office.

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For more information go to www.aston.ac.uk/alumni



Graduate Advantage

Are you a recent graduate in the West Midlands? Not sure what direction to go now? Get skills employers want by taking advantage of free training through Graduate Advantage and be one step ahead of your competitors. You can also gain some valuable experience with summer internships, graduate placements or part-time positions to help you clock up some career miles.

➔
For more information and to register go to www.graduateadvantage.co.uk

Lord Drayson visits campus

The Minister for Science and Innovation, Lord Drayson, visited the campus in November. The Aston University graduate studied Production Engineering and Robotics, gaining his PhD from Aston in 1986. His visit included a tour of the engineering facilities where he discovered first-hand the latest research work in photonics, mechanical engineering and bio-energy technologies. Lord Drayson said of his visit, “It has been wonderful to return to Aston University, where I have many happy memories. It was here that my passion for science was really ignited and it’s now my job to inspire a whole new generation of young people to not only study science and engineering, but to get excited about the careers and opportunities these subjects can offer.” He continues, “I’m excited about the bio energy research and the latest technology and research I’ve seen today at Aston University, and who knows, the person who makes the next big breakthrough in alternative fuels could be a student from within these laboratories.”

Electric car trial to tackle carbon emissions

Aston University and North Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust are piloting an exclusive electric car trial to help cut carbon emissions throughout the region. Aston is one of only 60 national organisations to have taken delivery of the latest smart ed (electric drive) car, which will be officially launched next year.

The iconic two-seater car, which is simply plugged into any UK mains three pin plug socket, emits zero pollution, travels 70 miles on a single charge, achieves the equivalent of 300 miles to the gallon and has a top speed of 60mph.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julia King, explained, “Electric vehicles are one major way in which we can begin to use advances in current technology to help reduce the UK’s greenhouse emissions. I shall look forward to using the car, which forms part of Aston’s Transport Action Plan to promote alternative and environmentally friendly travel.”

Other green travel initiatives at Aston include involvement with the national ‘WhizzGo’ scheme, the first pay-by-the-hour car club whereby staff and students can hire a car for as little as £4.85 an hour; a display screen in the main reception area providing up to the minute information on local transport for staff, students and visitors, and participation in the ‘carshare Birmingham’ scheme.

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For more information see: www.aston.ac.uk/environment/transport

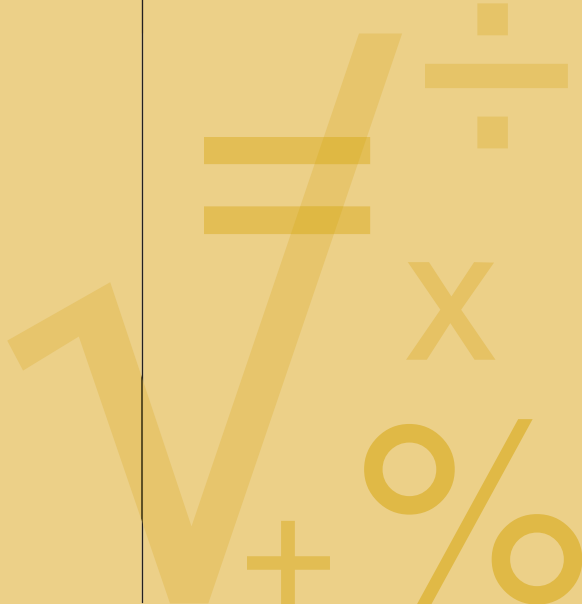


Maths aid is web success

An enterprising graduate has launched a GCSE Maths Revision DVD and it has become an online hit. Steven Britton developed the DVD, which features bite-sized topics to make learning easier to digest, after he received funding from the Prince’s Trust. Over 400 copies have been sold and the DVD is stocked by the online retailer amazon.co.uk. It has been distributed mainly in the UK but has been sent as far afield as New Zealand and India. The 2001 graduate pays tribute to his former Computer Science department at Aston, and in particular his former lecturer Bernard Doherty who “was very inspirational to me during my time at Aston.”

Steven is now looking to work on more educational products relating to Computer Science and Mathematics to be released later on this year.

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For more information visit Steven’s website www.topmathsdvd.co.uk



Graduate starts charity in her son’s name

Graduate Karen Capel (née Woodhead 1984 BSc Modern Languages) has set up a charity called Christopher’s Smile in the name of her young son who tragically died of cancer aged five years.

In October 2006, Karen and her husband Kevin were informed that their only child, Christopher, had a medulloblastoma – a type of cancerous brain tumour. Over the following 21 months Karen, Kevin and Christopher endured a rollercoaster of treatment, hope and despair. In total Christopher underwent five cycles of chemotherapy and stem cell transplants. The side effects of the surgery and chemotherapy were devastating. Christopher lost the ability to speak and walk, and suffered sickness, hair loss, diarrhoea, infections, fatigue and a loss of appetite. “It was like having to care for a new born baby all over again,” says Karen. “It was heart-breaking.”

Research into childhood cancer is grossly under-funded and children are currently treated with drugs developed for adult cancers. These harsh treatments can have serious effects on children who are still growing. This moved Karen and her husband, to set up a charity in Christopher’s name to help raise awareness of childhood cancer. All the money raised in this charity goes towards research into new drugs. “All donated money goes to the charity,” says Karen, “and we use our own money where necessary to cover any overheads.”

Their immediate target is to raise £30,000 to fund a Scientific Officer to work on paediatric drug development at the Institute of Cancer Research. With 2009 filled with fundraising events, Christopher’s Smile looks set to reach that target.

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For details of events planned in 2009, or to donate to Christopher’s Smile, visit the website at www.christopherssmile.org.uk Cancer fact file



- 200,000 children worldwide are diagnosed with cancer every year
- In the UK, one child in 600 is diagnosed with childhood cancer
- One in four children do not survive their illness
- Even when cancer treatment is successful, the side effects can be devastating
- For some childhood cancers, the survival rate has not changed since the 1970s.

The Aston Annual Fund

The Aston Annual Fund (AAF) has enjoyed a hugely successful year thanks to the generous support of Aston’s dedicated community of alumni, staff and friends. In the last six months over £65,000 has been pledged to support a variety of projects on campus. Such generosity has meant that over £250,000 has now been pledged to the AAF since it was established in 2005.

The AAF is primarily supported by two telephone fundraising appeals run each academic year. These appeals are staffed by current Aston students (pictured below), who thoroughly enjoy speaking to alumni, gaining valuable advice and support for their future careers and ambitions. We would like to thank all of you who took the time to speak to our students this year, and hope that you enjoyed hearing about Aston from the perspective of those currently studying here.



The work of the AAF is actively felt on campus with growing numbers of students benefitting from its good work. In the past year numerous projects have received funding, all of which have had an incredibly positive impact on campus. The School of Languages & Social Sciences received an award of £4,700 to establish an e-learning laboratory, which enables students to be taught languages in a much more interactive environment. Students studying International Business and Management were awarded £5,400 to provide free language modules for widening their skills base and improving their employability after the conclusion of their studies. Doctoral students in ABS received £3,000 to provide a wireless internet facility, and students studying combined honours courses received £5,000 to refurbish their common rooms. The Students’ Guild also benefitted hugely from the Fund, receiving £6,500 to provide additional computing facilities and £2,000 to boost the much need Guild Emergency Loan, which provides students in sudden and unexpected financial difficulty with a small cash loan. In addition to all of these enormously worthwhile projects, an additional £37,000 has been awarded in scholarships and bursaries; to those students who are exceptionally talented, or who would struggle to finance a degree independently.

If you would like to support the AAF please do not hesitate to contact our Annual Fund Manager, Luke Taylor, on l.a.taylor@aston.ac.uk. A gift to the AAF can benefit a student in whichever way you deem fit, and helps us to preserve our tradition of attracting the best and brightest students, regardless of their background.

If you would like to support the AAF please visit our website www.aston.ac.uk/alumni.

The AAF – helping Aston students to shine



Little Green Sheep

You probably wouldn’t expect to find two young male entrepreneurs in the world of baby products, but Aston graduates Mark Nicholls (2006 BSc Marketing) and Paul Maurice (2008 BSc Industrial Product Design) have taken the female-led market by storm with their ‘Little Green Sheep’ brand of premium organic baby products.

“The Little Green Sheep is all about providing babies with the best nights sleep,” explains Mark (above left). “We specialise in offering high quality organic baby bedtime products. Our core product range is organic cot mattresses and baby bedding which help provide babies with a safe and natural environment in which to sleep and rest. Our mattresses are handmade and use no harmful chemicals so they are ecologically sound and parents can rest assured that their babies are sleeping in a safe, natural environment.”

When quizzed on their inspiration to start the company, Mark and Paul emphasise how they felt that the baby retail market lacked personality and the personal touch: “We were extremely surprised at how stale the market had become, especially given that having a baby is one of the most emotional moments in people’s lives.”

The Little Green Sheep brand is positioned in a slightly more quirky, niche way than other larger brands and Mark and Paul focus just as much on customer service as on the quality of their products. Mark and Paul are very much hands-on to ensure the success of their venture. “One day we’ll be suited and booted for a meeting with Harrods in London, the next, moving boxes around a warehouse! Every move is an investment for the entrepreneurial team who work to a strict budget. We can’t afford to make mistakes, we have to ensure that our figures stack up.”

But their commitment is paying off. In January 2009 Little Green Sheep had been trading for two years and had grown from baby shows and a website into exclusive baby boutiques across London. In February 2009, after two years trading, the company tripled its turnover in a baby show and a month later the product range expanded from 30 lines to over 200 including furniture, organic Moses baskets, toiletries and eco-white bedding. The brand hopes to take to the high street in 2010 with targets to have a chain of ten stores across the UK within five years. But the market isn’t an easy one and Mark and Paul remain realistic. They have overcome challenges and learnt much from their short time as young entrepreneurs in the market. They remain committed to their customers, talking to them and using their feedback to continually improve the company. “We continue to achieve optimistic growth targets,” explains Mark, “and long may it continue!”

For more information on the company, visit www.thelittlegreensheep.co.uk

Engineering Academy Planned

Aston University has a long tradition in engineering and applied sciences with many distinguished graduates reflecting that proud and successful tradition. High quality skills in engineering are increasingly critical in the United Kingdom. We face enormous global challenges, and we need our engineers and scientists to be well trained and intensely focused on finding solutions.

With those goals in mind, Aston University is leading an effort that will develop a new engineering academy based in Birmingham. The intent is to fill a skills gap and deliver the workforce needed to power an engineering renaissance in the UK. The proposed multi-million pound Academy will be the first university-led technology college in the country and is being created in partnership with Birmingham City Council.

A new trust led by former Conservative Education Secretary Kenneth Baker and education specialist Lord Dearing has been set up to push forward the Academy concept with the Birmingham centre used as a role model for the rest of the country. The ‘Aston University Engineering Academy, Birmingham’ is one of eight academies proposed by Birmingham City Council.

The proposed Academy will be based at the Aston Science Park, adjacent to the University, and cater for 600 pupils aged between 14 and 19 years old. The Academy will offer students apprenticeships and diploma courses in engineering and manufacturing and design, and in the automotive and creative industries.

In offering the prescribed elements in the curriculum, the diploma programme will be primarily concerned with building up business skills, entrepreneurship and skills in design, alongside high quality opportunities to develop hands-on skills using tools, equipment and machines. In the additional and supplementary learning there will be opportunities in collaboration with others to offer a language, the arts and humanities, as well as learning to augment the chosen specialism, for example in ICT and mathematics.

The Academy’s unique focus will be boosted by strong links with local and national industrial and commercial partners. It is envisaged that these partners will provide the necessary work-based experience, problem-based enquiry problems and suitable mentors and role models to support and enhance the academic curriculum and financial support.

Council Leader Mike Whitby said, “The proposed Academy will be an imaginative, innovative and dynamic part of Birmingham’s educational landscape. The focus on engineering and manufacturing with a strong emphasis on business enterprise will provide clear routes to further study and careers in an area where there is recognised skills shortage both locally and nationally.”

Aston’s Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alison Halstead, said, “This is an inspiring proposal and I am delighted that Aston University is a lead sponsor. The proposed Academy can play a key role in addressing the region’s skills gap and ensure that together we can foster a passion and enthusiasm for engineering that will enable us to produce a new generation of innovative and talented engineers.”

Aston University has one of its four main faculties focused on engineering and applied sciences. A research intensive university that is currently 12th in the UK leagues tables, the majority of its degree programmes have links to industry (over 70% of undergraduate students engage in a placement year). Aston is keen to ensure that from aged 14 young people can see clear progression routes into university or colleges of further education, or through apprenticeships to employment. Its leadership will ensure that creativity, innovation and problem-based and enquiry-led learning feature strongly within the curriculum delivery. The industrial partners linked to the lead sponsor will also ensure that the Academy has an employer-led and supported curriculum in place.

The Aston University Engineering Academy, Birmingham, is being supported by Matthew Bolton College and Sutton Coldfield College, Rolls-Royce plc, National Grid, E.ON, Metrology Ltd, Sterling Power Group Ltd and the Veolia Environmental Development Centre Ltd.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has given approval for the feasibility stage of the proposed Academy. Meetings are currently taking place between DCSF, Aston University and Birmingham City Council to establish a core development team.



From left, Councillor Les Lawrence, Council Leader Mike Whitby, Lord Baker and Professor Alison Halstead (Aston University) in front of the proposed new Engineering Academy site.

“The proposed Academy will be an imaginative, innovative and dynamic part of Birmingham’s educational landscape.”



Letter of the Law

Text message analysis is becoming a powerful tool in solving crimes. Texters can no longer rely on this method of communication being anonymous because advances in forensic linguistic research have made it possible to predict the gender, age and even the identity of the sender with some degree of success.

Dr Tim Grant, Deputy Director of Aston's Centre for Forensic Linguistics, pictured above, reports that language analysis is increasingly playing a key role in police investigations and court cases such as the prosecution of David Hodgson who was convicted for the murder of his ex-lover Jenny Nicholl in February 2008. He believes that, despite public concerns about the growth of a surveillance society, the ability to identify authorship of electronic communications is beneficial.

Forensic linguistics uses a descriptive approach to demonstrate that there are several stylistic features which authors consistently use in messages. Examples of this include the shortening of "I am" to "im", the use of numbers in phrases such as "go2shop", spaces between words and the use of "dont" (with no apostrophe) compared to "dnt." The forensic linguist looks to see which potential author has a style most similar to that used in questioned texts.

It is also possible to build a sociolinguistic profile of a text message author. Dr Grant has put together a database of more than 7,000 texts as part of his research into text messaging style and variation between individuals and groups of individuals. His study seeks to establish how groups of people who text one another frequently grow more similar in their texting style and he has now developed a method to quantify people's style of text writing. "Collecting the data is a continuous process – language changes and moves on all the time," said Dr Grant. The public can contribute to his ongoing research by submitting text samples to www.forensiclinguistics.net/texting.

The Centre for Forensic Linguistics is seeing a growth in the number of cases they are being asked to comment on – forensic linguistics is moving from an expertise-based opinion into the scientific field. Aston's Centre for Forensic Linguistics, under the Directorship of Professor Malcolm Coulthard, is the only centre of its type in the world where research, teaching and consultancy come together in one place. A programme of seminars is planned along with a new distance learning MSc Forensic Linguistics course.

For more details on the work of the Centre, visit www.aston.ac.uk/forensic-linguistics

Cancer Researchers Reunite

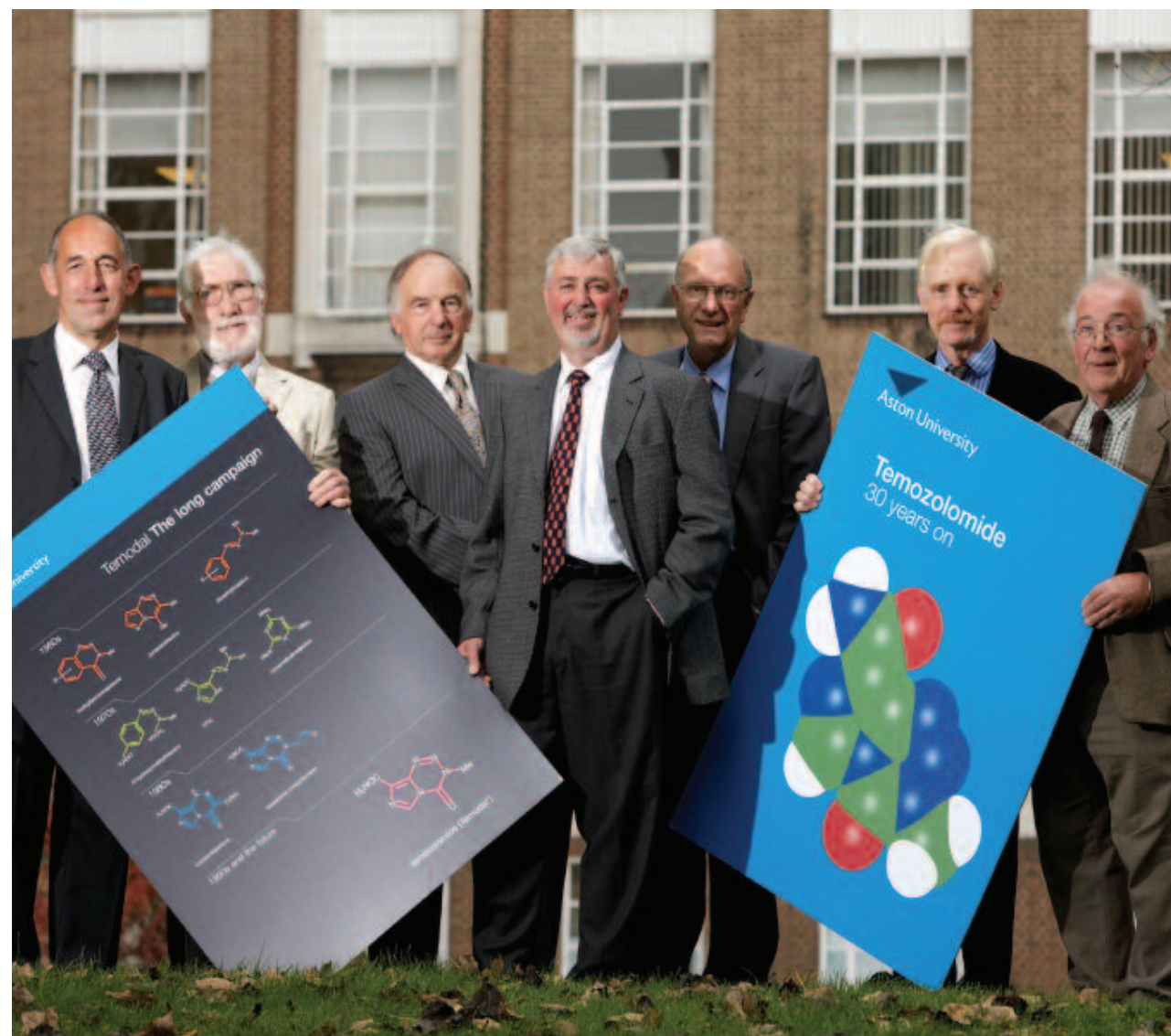
Academics and researchers from across the world gathered at Aston on October 15th to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the start of the research project which led to the discovery of the drug Temodal (temozolomide). It was a double celebration as 2008 saw the drug reach blockbuster sales status of over US \$1 billion.

Thirty years ago, a talented group of Aston University academics formed an integrated anti-cancer drug research group in the School of Pharmacy. In 1978, Robert Stone, a local Aston graduate from Birmingham, joined the research group and was given simple instructions to "make some interesting molecules." He did much more than that.

In 1980, he synthesised molecules which went on to have a major impact in the development of cancer treatment worldwide. Methazolastone (temozolomide) has now become the worldwide agent of choice in the treatment of brain tumours (glioma).



1978



2008

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The discovery of temozolomide was undoubtedly a huge achievement. But it also stands as an example of how research teams in an academic environment can work together to achieve results that change the world.

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The temozolomide story is far from over. Sales continue to rise, the drug is a favoured partner in new drug combinations and there are real possibilities for extending temozolomide into additional therapeutic areas. Professor Malcolm Stevens said, "During Bob Stone's industrial placement in 1980 he synthesised some small molecules which have made a major impact in cancer treatment. The first, the ill-fated Azolastone (mitozolomide) foundered on its unacceptable clinical toxicities.

Then came Methazolastone (temozolomide) and thanks to the devoted work of Aston's small team of pharmacologists (especially PhD students Neil Gibson and Simon Langdon) and pharmaceutical scientists (working under Dr John Slack), temozolomide has now become the agent of choice in the treatment of brain tumours (glioma)."

Professor Julia King, Aston's Vice-Chancellor, said, "The discovery of temozolomide was undoubtedly a huge achievement. But it also stands as an example of how research teams in an academic environment can work together to achieve results that change the world. We want to create a research environment at Aston which could lead to the discovery of the next temozolomide. We believe that, given the right resources and support, talent and hard work, we can come together to develop another medicinal discovery on this scale. In honour and recognition of this thirtieth anniversary, and to ensure that leading edge research continues into the future, we are creating a Chair in Drug Discovery. Our intention is to attract an internationally recognised researcher who will lead future advances in drug discovery and development and who, along with colleagues, can ensure the School's science goals are met."

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The rankings show that Aston MBA graduates can expect a salary increase of 99% on what they were earning previously.

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MBA in Financial Times Top 100

The top 100 business schools worldwide aspire to be the best at what they do. They inspire those who learn with them ensuring that robust knowledge graduates into business with students and establishes thought leadership. This sets them apart from other leading schools. Aston Business School is no different and, following the appearance of its flagship full-time MBA course, it has finally proven its pedigree and is for the first time in *The Financial Times’ (FT) Top 100 Schools*.

ABS’s flagship full-time MBA course was ranked 77th in the world in the *FT’s* iconic list of business schools worldwide. This demonstrates ABS’s sustained and rapid progress towards being recognised as one of the top business schools in the country. Closer to home, the course sits in 12th position in the UK and 21st in Europe.

Professor Mike West, Executive Dean, said, “This is fantastic news for Aston Business School. We are very proud of our MBA programme which has the power to improve the career prospects, earning potential and management skills of our students. In these difficult economic times, programmes like the MBA take on added importance. Being in the *FT’s* top 100 schools is a great achievement for us and shows our students and potential students that an Aston MBA is a valuable and high quality qualification.”

The *FT* survey examines a range of criteria including career progression, diversity of staff and student bodies as well as the quality of academic faculty. For example, the rankings show that Aston MBA graduates can expect a salary increase of 99% on what they were earning previously. This goes some way to explaining why Aston was ranked 20th in the world for ‘Value for Money.’

Aston has been positioned well in FT rankings over the last few years for other areas of study; in particular, the Executive MBA was ranked 50th in the world, 15th in Europe and 8th in the UK in 2007. The Masters in Management programme came 3rd in the UK and 18th in the world in 2008 (including 1st in the world for Careers Rank, for the MSc in International Business) and 27th in Europe in the *FT’s* league table of business schools in 2007.

In a recent Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), ABS also came 9th in the UK, based on the percentage of research rated as world-leading or of international significance.

Professor West continued, “This latest ranking is another indication that our goal of being in the top 5 in the UK, top 10 in Europe, and top 50 in the world is achievable. We take great heart from this result and look forward to building on it in the next twelve months and beyond.”

Leading Businesses Through the Economic Downturn

As a key thought leader, Aston Business School (ABS) is paving the way as businesses look to this internationally acclaimed school to address some of the key issues and thinking surrounding the current economic downturn.

A series of lectures and events have been organised in conjunction with Aston Science Park throughout the year to highlight and discuss the issues businesses are facing at this time. With a 50 per cent increase in applications for its executive development programme, ABS is also set to support more business leaders and students through one of the toughest times in our recent history.

The Challenging Times series of events, in association with the *Birmingham Post*, focused on the Midlands and how businesses, according to Dr John Rudd, lecturer in Marketing and Strategic Management, who cut back their spending on marketing during the downturn will lose out in the long run.

Dr Rudd offered advice and support to local businesses but expressed the need for West Midlands firms to keep focused on their marketing efforts. He said, “Research shows that the long-term winners do not reduce marketing or advertising in a downturn. In fact, with fewer businesses spending on such things now is the time to get more for your buck and increase your “share of voice” when we come out of recession.”

Dr Rudd added, “Marketing must work harder and generate more for your money by being realistic and measurable. Digital Marketing can help but it shouldn’t be seen as a cheap alternative.”

The ‘Shaping the Future’ seminar saw many of the region’s leading businesses gather to discuss how Birmingham can work towards a better future. The breakfast seminar provoked an energetic exchange of views on leadership, diversification and innovation. The overwhelming consensus was that it is only through working together that the City can truly realise its potential.



Organised by Aston Business School, Birmingham Forward and Locate In Birmingham, the discussion was opened by Professor Mike West, Executive Dean of Aston Business School. He stressed just how vital it was for universities and businesses to collaborate and communicate effectively to help secure Birmingham’s future as a global player.

“We have a history of innovation and entrepreneurship in the region and a UK Higher Education sector that is ranked second in the world in terms of quality and quantity of research. It’s essential that we work together to define and communicate the important steps we need to progress and that our leaders have the courage to innovate our way out of the current global downturn,” he said.

Richard Brennan, Chief Executive of Birmingham Forward, described the seminar as, “An excellent forum for debate and exchange of a wide-range of ideas and viewpoints.” Mike Loftus, Manager of Locate In Birmingham, said, “It’s vital at a time like this that we work together as the City needs to harness all of its resources if it is to raise its profile and achieve success. The seminar was timely and worthwhile and is something we’ll certainly hope to repeat.”



A ‘Coffee Good’ Recession Busting Idea

More business leaders and students are turning to ABS to give them greater knowledge that could, in turn, set them on the road to success. Anna Hubble is one successful entrepreneur that, even in the current climate, is determined that her business has the best start.

Anna, aged 23, graduated from ABS last year and, regardless of the economic slowdown, has opened a coffee and juice bar. Her business acumen and drive has ensured that she’s got off to the very best start and should see her on the road to success.

Following her graduation with a BSc in Business Management, Anna returned to her roots in Kingswinford. Many would be put off starting a new business now but for Anna, it made sense. “We’re in a recession that could last for years. ABS taught me that you have to take a chance and do what it is that you want to do. Opportunities don’t come along all the time and when they do, you just have to take them.”

Anna told us, “It was essential for me to not waste time waiting for the market to change. The marketing and PR elements to the course really helped me to get the business message across and made me stand out from the crowd.”

A placement at Marston’s Pub Company was both relevant and one of the best experiences she could have had. “It was ideal and really helped me to make the most of my business.”

Using her knowledge to the best of her advantage, Anna’s story has appeared in the *Birmingham Post*, *Stourbridge News*, *Express and Star* and also online, ensuring that, for some, the current climate certainly opens doors.

En Route to Success

‘Routes into Languages’ is a major national initiative aimed at increasing and widening participation in language study in the 14-19 age group. Aston’s School of Languages & Social Sciences is the lead institute of the West Midlands Regional Consortium and also actively participates in the National Network for Translation.

Throughout February and March, over 200 Year 8 pupils have been to campus to take part in a series of cultural events aimed at broadening their horizons and showing languages in the real world. Pupils attending the Chinese seminar were able to try out tai chi, calligraphy and language workshops as well as joining in with Aston students to celebrate Chinese New Year. The Spanish, French and German sessions were led by native speakers of countries as far and wide as Mexico, Guadeloupe, Congo and Austria and pupils learnt about languages in a global context. LSS was also delighted to have been able to showcase the Routes into Languages programme and the University to a number of distinguished guests from the Goethe Institut, DAAD, the Cervantes Institute and the Spanish and French Embassies.



Helen Campbell from the European Commission gave a public lecture for the National Network for Translation entitled ‘Careers in Translation and Interpreting for the European Union and the United Nations’ followed by a workshop on the topic ‘How work-ready are graduates of translation programmes?’ The workshop brought together representatives from translation companies and universities from the West Midlands, postgraduate students and a representative from CILT, the National Centre for Languages and focused on exploring possibilities for co-operation and closer links between universities and translation companies. It provided an excellent opportunity to share experience, professional concerns and explore new ideas. Aston plans to host events similar to this in the future.

The ‘Routes into Languages’ programme is funded by the Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCFS) until 2009/2010 with many more exciting events and projects planned over the coming year to increase enthusiasm and participation in language learning.



Bienvenue!
Willkommen!
Huan ying!
Bienvenido!
Velkommen!



Allan & Nesta Ferguson Trust Scholarship Partnerships

African and South American students are greatly under-represented in UK higher education due to the comparatively high UK tuition fees, cost of living and long-haul travel expenses. Aston University wanted to make a difference by reaching out and nurturing talent while also enhancing the student experience at Aston by diversifying our postgraduate programmes.

In 2005 the Development & Alumni Relations Office secured a pledge of support from the Allan and Nesta Ferguson Trust for tuition fee scholarships for African MBA students. The Ferguson Trust was set up in memory of two generations of the Ferguson family to support education, international friendship and understanding, and the promotion of world peace and development.

The ‘MBA Africa Scholarship’ in Aston Business School was launched in 2006/07, offering six MBA students from Africa a £15,500 Scholarship towards their £21,000 tuition fee. The Scholarship was funded by both Aston University and the Ferguson Trust, while the Scholarship winners made the remaining contribution to their fees and also funded all their own living costs and travel expenses. The programme expanded into the School of Languages & Social Sciences in 2007/08 with an additional pledge of support from the Ferguson Trust and Aston University. The ‘International Friendship & Understanding Scholarship’ supports six African or South American students each year enrolling on the LSS MA programmes in TESOL Studies, Translation Studies, TESOL and Translation Studies, and Applied Linguistics. The £7,240 Scholarship towards £8,240 tuition fees is funded in equal parts by the Ferguson Trust and Aston University, with the Scholarship winners funding their remaining fees, travel expenses and living costs.

The Aston University – Ferguson Trust scholarship partnerships have proven to be a resounding success. The Ferguson Trust has supported Aston with over £185,000 to date, and the scheme has offered truly life-changing opportunities for talented individuals who would not have been able to consider pursuing postgraduate education in the UK without some financial support. Unprecedented numbers of African and South American students have enrolled on our postgraduate programmes since 2006, with applications received from Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Venezuela, Brazil and Argentina. The Ferguson students have contributed significantly and greatly enhanced our postgraduate programmes through their talent and enthusiasm for study, and have gone on to be wonderful ambassadors for the University.

New Degree Gives Students a Competitive Advantage

It is an exciting time to be studying law, which is one of the most popular subjects at university. Greater competition is transforming the legal profession and successful lawyers need more than legal knowledge to succeed.

Business knowledge is essential because of the increasing complexity of transactions and increasing demands from clients. Competition is also fierce amongst graduates; there are many law graduates and employers have high expectations. Leading law firm Herbert Smith expects its trainees to have commercial awareness and those wanting to join Addleshaw Goddard are told that its lawyers are business advisors not just legal advisors.

Aston’s new four year LLB Law with Management degree, which launched last year, provides students with the knowledge required to develop a successful legal career and gain a competitive advantage. The course has a strong commercial law focus and also enhances students’ business knowledge and skills. Taught within Aston Business School, students study the core legal subjects (as prescribed by the legal profession) and modules including company law and intellectual property law. They also study management subjects, including accounting and economics, and modules designed to develop their academic and soft skills. Applications for the LLB have been high, with ten applications for each place.

A placement year is compulsory on the LLB and this further enhances students’ commercial knowledge and business skills. Students can spend their placement year in a legal or commercial setting. “The year long placement provides an excellent opportunity for the student to make a contribution and for the employer to know the student well,” said Aston’s Head of Law, Professor Jill Poole. She added, “We are delighted with the interest shown in our new LLB by local law firms but we are very keen to develop further opportunities for our students.”

If you would like more information about the degree or you would like to advertise placements to our students, please contact Nicola Bullivant, Placement Manager on +44 (0) 121 204 3247, n.s.bullivant@aston.ac.uk

Village: Green

Graduates must bid farewell to their former student accommodation next year to make way for a green revolution on campus. Aston is leading the way in sustainability in the UK while providing smart new on-campus living quarters.



“The building work is all part of Aston's commitment to lead the way in sustainability in the UK and provide students with the best services in the most environmentally friendly way.”



Aston students are preparing for a major redevelopment on campus that will break new ground in sustainability.

Plans are underway to demolish the concrete, energy-consuming accommodation blocks of the 60s and 70s to make way for a new generation of eco-friendly Halls of Residence.

Sustainability is at the heart of the University's Sustainable Growth Mission, which is a core part of its 2012 Strategy – a five year plan that was established in 2007 to set out the goals Aston needed to establish itself as a top 10 UK university.

The new buildings that are part of the £215m student accommodation development will incorporate a wide range of energy efficiency measures. Energy requirements will be reduced through the use of double-glazing and sophisticated lighting systems that are only active if people are present in a room and switch off automatically as they leave.

Rainwater will be recycled and roofs will be covered with grass and plants, improving insulation and absorbing water, which cuts down on run-off to drains. This type of roof also encourages wildlife and biodiversity in the area.

The roofs will hold wind turbines and, although they will not generate huge amounts of electricity, it is hoped that they may be able to produce enough electricity to provide lighting for the residences.

The most impressive environmental measure, though, is the new Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant.

The plant – being built in the boiler house next to Matthew Boulton College – will provide heat and power for the accommodation blocks on site. Traditional power generation loses energy through heat, but CHP captures the heat and uses it to provide hot water, central heating and air conditioning. On-site generation also avoids energy loss through transit and provides a more secure source of energy (see box on page 20).

Eventually, the CHP will also allow the University to sell heat and power to third parties, generating income that can be ploughed back into further University improvements that benefit students.

The plant is part of a wider CHP project throughout the city being delivered by Birmingham District Energy, which already manages CHP plants providing energy to the Town Hall, Council House, the NIA, ICC and the REP.

Aston's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julia King, is leading Aston's green ambitions. As the author of the 2007 'King Review' – the Government-commissioned report into reducing carbon emissions from road transport – she has a special grasp of environmental issues.

“The threat to the environment from inefficient energy systems places a requirement on us all to reduce our carbon footprint. This major campus redevelopment shows how Aston is leading the way in energy efficiency in the UK,” said the Vice-Chancellor.

The environmental considerations being made in the construction of the new accommodation are a major improvement on the old high rises. While many graduates will have fond memories of their former accommodation, the dated designs were wasting valuable energy.

As the student population has grown and existing accommodation blocks near the end of their useful lives, Aston has taken the opportunity to improve its residential offering. The new accommodation will be much more stylish and will rival any of the smart apartment developments in the centre of Birmingham.

Students are the heart of Aston University, which is why it has always strived to have plenty of accommodation on campus. The redevelopment will provide 2400 new rooms with en suite bathrooms, and thanks to the University's prime location, it means students still have easy access to the highlights of the country's second city.

Having its students living – as well as studying – within the University environment has been the secret to maintaining the special buzz around the Aston campus, which has been so important to the University's friendly reputation.

Student living will be transformed by the new accommodation with high-quality, well-maintained rooms. Other features of the development include student common rooms, a new artificial sports pitch, car park and shops.

The new arrangement of buildings makes better use of the available space, so that there will be more green space and room to include a cycle track around the lake. This means that the completed development will provide a unique combination of city-centre living with an oasis of calm.

To ensure that there is no loss of accommodation during the construction, the

first phase has been started before demolishing the existing towers. The first blocks are being built on the south-east side of the campus off Jennens Road and will provide 1350 en suite rooms to students by next year.

The existing towers will then be demolished to make way for two new blocks on the north-west of the campus which will be complete by 2014. This will increase the total number of rooms on the campus to 2400, ensuring that all international and first year students who apply in time continue to be guaranteed accommodation.

Garry East, Director of Estates at Aston University, said, "Phase 1 will be completed in August 2010 and will allow the University to keep student numbers at their current levels.

"Then, from September 2010, we will start demolishing the existing buildings, including Lawrence Tower, Dalton Tower, King Edward House, the Vauxhall buildings, Gem House and the ground floor extension of Stafford House."

The demolition will take nine months and will be done with a combination of controlled implosion and deconstructing.

Garry added, "Experts have told us that the safest way is through 'soft stripping' followed by blowing them up. There are a lot of asbestos materials in there, so we'll take them out, then the cladding and the fitted furniture such as kitchens, leaving behind the masonry. Then we'll use explosives to bring them down."

The facades of the new buildings will be similar to the existing Lakeside residences. Garry said, "Two of the new buildings will be up to 18 storeys at the ends, but the mean height will be about nine storeys and they will all be kitted out to the highest standards of student accommodation."

Demolition day will mark the end of an era and many graduates will no doubt mourn the loss of their former Halls of Residence, where their relationship with Aston was born.

President of the Students' Guild, Gurj Summan, said, "Over the years, many friendships – and even marriages – have been formed inside those high rises but the memories will live on long after they are torn down. The new accommodation with its green focus will make Aston even more appealing to existing and potential new students. We're all very proud that the University is pioneering sustainable student living."

The new buildings will stand proudly at the heart of the campus as a visible reminder that Aston is not only implementing best practice but also pushing the frontiers to create a more sustainable environment. Most graduates would surely agree their former Halls are a worthy sacrifice.

If you have memories and photos of Dalton, Stafford or Lawrence Halls of Residences that you would like to share in Apex, please contact the Development & Alumni Relations Office on + 44 (0) 121 204 4239 or email alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk

“

Demolishing the existing towers will free up land around the lake, and that will all be landscaped to include a cycle track.

”



Garry East, Director of Estates

Combined Heat and Power – making fuel go further

One of the biggest problems in power supply in the modern era is efficiency. Up to two-thirds of the energy from a conventional power station is lost – mostly through heat, but also in transmission from the plant to where it is needed.

Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plants get round those problems. Firstly, energy is generated on site, so there is little distance through which to lose energy in transmission.

Secondly, the heat that is usually lost through the energy production is captured and used to provide hot water and central heating – and even drive air conditioning in hot summer months.

CHP can be fuelled either through burning biomass – such as timber – which is regarded as carbon-neutral because it has absorbed carbon while it has been growing, or fossil fuels. But because so much more energy is captured, less fuel is needed than in conventional power supply systems.

The Government is committed to achieving recommendations set out by the Committee on Climate Change to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent from 1990 levels by 2050. And Aston University is determined to play its part, which is why it has included a section on Sustainable Growth in its 2012 Strategy.

By ensuring that users get more efficiency out of their energy, CHP is an integral part of the country's carbon reduction policy.

But there are other benefits too. Firstly, their increased efficiency is directly converted into cost savings for the user. They also provide more energy security. Production is local and the user is in total control over its own power supply, meaning that it is less susceptible to power cuts and fluctuating costs and supply from imported fuel sources.

With so much of the country's energy coming from imported fuel – particularly oil and gas – the importance of having a reliable source cannot be underestimated.



EcoCampus

The Aston Student Village project is just one of the schemes the University is taking part in as part of its environmental commitment.

Aston has signed up to EcoCampus, a three-year environmental management programme tailored for higher education institutions.

EcoCampus is an environmental management system and allows universities to improve their environmental performance and be recognised for high standards.

There are four levels of award – Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum – and Aston is being audited for the Bronze level this summer. It hopes to get the Platinum award by the time it reaches the end of the programme in 2011. Platinum level is equivalent to the ISO14001 standard.

The Bronze element of the EcoCampus scheme is focused on planning, and involves measuring the institution's baseline performance and securing the resources to embark on an environmental management system. It asks participants to ensure senior management commitment, implement environmental awareness training, a baseline environmental review and a draft environmental policy.

As part of its efforts to achieve the Bronze award, Aston has focused on five areas: community involvement; emissions and discharges; environmental management systems; policy; and sustainable procurement.

Aston is one of 13 institutions in the first full cohort, following a pilot scheme starting in 2006 involving ten other universities.



Matched Funding: a Golden Opportunity

It is no secret that there have been significant changes and reforms in the funding of higher education over the past five years. These changes have often been controversial, and many have voiced opposition to the funding structures that have been put in place. Yet despite differences in opinion, our aims and ambitions remain much the same: to improve access to, and the quality of, education at Aston.

Funding on the scale necessary cannot come from tax payers alone, particularly when universities have to compete in an increasingly international arena. Therefore alternative income streams have to be sourced and, having listened to the findings of numerous independent reports and taskforces, the Government believes it timely to encourage a fundraising culture in all English and Welsh universities. Aston is no exception.

This approach is not without precedent. Private fundraising, from alumni and businesses, is a major source of university income in the United States. The amount of public money spent on higher education is comparable, but private giving is far, far greater. On average, US universities have endowments fourteen times greater than their UK counterparts, funded largely by philanthropic support.

The spirit in which this support is offered is inspiring to us all; their donors are people who have worked hard to succeed and are determined to give what they can, in both time and money, to better the quality of life for future generations. It is a proud part of their history, and should be a proud fixture of our future.

In August 2008 the Government launched a Matched Funding scheme to incentivise voluntary giving at universities in England and Wales. For a three year period, from 2008 to 2011, the scheme will match most donations made to Aston University on a 2:1 basis, up to a ceiling of £1.3 million. The scheme includes matching the 25% in Gift Aid that is already recoverable from gifts made by UK taxpayers. This means that a £100 donation could become worth £188 to us, an enhancement of 88% and a tremendous opportunity for donors to augment the impact of their gifts.

We can take pride in the fact that Aston is renowned for being an extremely well-managed, financially buoyant University, benefiting from strong, astute leadership throughout its history. We want to continue in our progress, and improve for many years to come, with the passionate involvement, support and dedication of our alumni and friends.

"This is an exciting time of growth and renewal at Aston. We are working to establish ourselves as a top 10 UK university whilst retaining Aston's core value: delivering accessible excellence. Donations make an enormous difference in our ability to do this, which makes the matched funding scheme particularly welcome." Professor Julia King, Vice-Chancellor.



Project: Uganda

In June twenty-five Aston University students will be packing their bags and heading to the Republic of Uganda for a unique volunteering project.

In conjunction with the charity Softpower Education they hope that within four weeks they will be able to make a difference to the small communities based in the Jinja district.

With the help of local tradesmen they will be building new classrooms at the Kiresa and Mpambwe Primary Schools as well as teaching the children basic English, Maths and Science. Each Aston student also hopes to take a donated laptop out to Uganda in their hand luggage which, if achieved, will be enough to set up an IT lab.

Using their unique skills, they will also be involved in other tasks with four engineering students working on irrigation and water collection projects.

Business students will also be putting their skills to good use by running business workshops as well as giving one-to-one advice to entrepreneurs and businesses. This is a vital part of the project as without a strong foundation of local businesses the area will never overcome its problems.

International Business and Management student, Mike Bandar, volunteered in Uganda last year and is responsible this year for coordinating a larger group of student volunteers. There have been several challenges to overcome for the 2009 project. “The first major obstacle was getting a vibrant team together,” Mike says, “then there is the fundraising. The whole team gets involved raising funds from charity club nights to bungee jumps by the lake on campus.”

So, what does the team hope their biggest contribution will be? “I would like to achieve a sustainable difference to someones life” says Mike. “It’s great to actually see where the money goes and that every penny counts. I believe that nobody can do everything but everybody can do something.”

This is a project that will both test and develop the skills of Aston students in a unique environment as well as benefiting the communities in the Jinji district.

For more information about the project, please go to www.softpowerededucation.com or contact the Aston student coordinator, Mike Bandar, directly at bandarm@aston.ac.uk

“I would like to achieve a sustainable difference to someone’s life. It’s great to actually see where the money goes and that every penny counts.”



Carlos Edem (left) and Gurj Summan at the One World Week in February 2009. The food festival on the Tuesday attracted over 800 students who tasted foods from all over the world.

The President’s Update

Gurj Summan reports on his year as President of the Students’ Guild.

This year has been a rollercoaster ride, full of ups and downs that have kept me on the edge of my seat the entire time! No one day at the Guild is the same. My time as President has truly been a fantastic opportunity to be a part of the Guild and to help create a better student experience.

Surprisingly the year began slowly in the summer as we began preparing a programme of special themed nights for Freshers’ Week and trips to the local supermarkets, laser quests, Cadburys World and Alton Towers. The objective was to help new students settle in and make new friends. What a success! Freshers’ Week attracted over 1500 students at the events every night.

On a personal note, I’ve achieved everything I aimed for this year. I am really proud of the people I work with and all the people who helped get everything in place to make some great things happen – such as International Night ‘Bollywood’ Theme, One World Week (a cultural explosion of events including a balloon release, carnival, food festival, sports day and culture show to celebrate the diversity of the student population at Aston, and, of course, amazing Astonbury 2009 – a student festival on campus, also known as the best event of the year.

As a student representative, working with the University has been a tremendous experience; learning more about how the University works and fighting for the needs of students in meetings has been a great achievement. Some of the important causes close to my heart this year have been helping to campaign for better sports facilities, helping with the campus student accommodation redevelopment, ICT facilities, library and internet.

I wouldn’t change my year for the world. I sincerely feel that not just the same students but a wide range of students have felt welcome and more at home here at Aston today. We at the Guild know that they have felt happy as they stepped on Aston soil, proud to be an Aston student.

News from Aston Graduates’ Association

Jenny Martin updates readers on the recent activities of AGA.

Earlswood Museum

On Saturday 6th September 2008 it rained, the wind blew and, on one of the worst days in history for bad weather, AGA members and friends visited the Earlswood Museum. After we had dried out and warmed up with coffee and home made cakes, we were treated to a tour of the archives displayed in the village hall. The curators talked about the history of the area, including stories of escaped prisoners of war, the importance of the building of the local railway and an explanation of how the Earlswood Reservoir is designed to keep the local area flood free. We were meant to visit the local craft centre, but this had to be abandoned due to flooding!

60th Anniversary Celebrations

Almost 50 members and friends joined us in November to celebrate our 60th anniversary with a dinner held in Astons, the restaurant on the 6th floor of the Main Building on campus. We were honoured to have the company of The Chancellor, Sir Michael Bett, The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julia King and her partner, and Sir Adrian and Lady Cadbury. We were also privileged to have 12 past AGA Chairmen covering 22 years of our history. The Vice-Chancellor reviewed the current situation at Aston and outlined some of the recent achievements and this was followed by many stories and much nostalgia by AGA members. Particular thanks are due to the catering staff for making this such a special occasion.

Come Dine with Me

January 2009 saw AGA members dining at The College of Food in Birmingham. This has become a very popular event and this year the menu was outstanding. Aston Graduates enjoyed their gourmet evening and seem keen to continue with this date next year.

Peruvian Memories

Alan Hughes, our past Chairman and Treasurer, gave an excellent illustrated talk about his visit to Peru at our February meeting. The holiday, which was described as a walking holiday, covered the whole of this extensive country. He described his visit to the Inca city of Machu Pichu and the way in which this civilisation survived in very difficult terrain. The photographs of the Animal Man of the Amazon with snakes, sloths and turtles amongst other species were outstanding. His description of life in the cities with predominately a Spanish cultural background and the comparison with life in the mountainous regions was very interesting. Alan brought along a selection of souvenirs from his travels together with books and maps to enable us to understand exactly how the party had managed to cover so much territory in the three weeks he was away.

The Annual General Meeting of Aston Graduates’ Association had to be moved to 23rd April this year due to unforeseen circumstances. After a review of the current situation at Aston by the Vice-Chancellor and the usual business of the meeting, members enjoyed the traditional wine and cheese buffet.

Dates for your diary

Friday May 15th: Visit to the John Hardman Studio. John Hardman was a friend of the architect Pugin and together they worked on many arts and craft projects, including the stained glass windows for The Houses of Parliament. The current owner rents out the studios for similar projects.

Friday June 5th: Joint meeting with Birmingham Guild of Graduates at Aston. Dr. Portsmouth will speak about the Ancient Art of Heraldry. The talk will be followed by a finger buffet and a glass of wine.

Saturday 1st August: Traditional Petanque competition, AGA v Hints Village Team.

Badges

AGA badges are available from the secretary (tel +44 (0)121 427 2047) price £5 to include packing and postage.

60s

Chris Bray (née Nixon 1966 BSc Pharmacy)

I retired from the Pharmacy Department at Worcestershire Royal Hospital at the end of 2007 after 25 years. I am currently doing a Distance Learning Cert. HE course in Biblical Studies and Ministry.

My hobbies are tennis and cycle touring. I have 11 grandchildren spread between Malvern, London and South Africa!



Iqbal Ahmed (1969 MSc Nuclear Reactor Technology)

Mr Ahmed is currently an Advisor to Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission which he joined soon after graduating from Aston. Prior to his current appointment he worked as Chief Scientist and Director of The Institute for Nuclear Power in Islamabad. Earlier he served as a research scientist (1969–1980) at Pakistan Institute of Nuclear Science & Technology and for close to two decades (1980–1999) as plant physicist at the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant. His R&D interests relate to In-Core Fuel Management, Spent Fuel Studies, Nuclear Safeguards, NPP Safety and Nuclear Security. He was responsible for KANUPP reactor physics re-do for the project KFSAR update at Ontario Hydro in 1994–95. Among his other accomplishments are the development of Spent CANDU Fuel Bundle Verifier and Verification of extremely short cooling time fuel bundles, under the aegis of IAEA.

Mr Ahmed is a life member of the Pakistan Nuclear Society. He served in December 2007 as a member of the International Panel of Experts for the Evaluation of the IAEA Programme on Nuclear Security.

Mr Ahmed lives in Islamabad. Among his hobbies are tending to his fruit orchard at his farmhouse in Wakefield Gardens, Taxila.

Abhay Hajare (1969 MSc Industrial Metallurgy)

After graduating I returned to Bombay, India, which is my hometown. I have held engineering positions in various companies since then until my retirement from Indian Card Clothing Co. Ltd in 2002. During this time, I have continued writing academic papers (21) and was invited to present my paper on 'Parametric Costing – Steel Wire Mill' in Ohio, USA in 1998.



Main areas of my experience are steel wire and card clothing. I also give services on email towards enhancing quality, productivity, profitability, accurate composition on blending and wire drawing.

70s

Martin Saunders (1973 BSc Chemical Engineering)

I've been back in the UK since 1999. Now self-employed, working as a NVQ Assessor in Health, Safety and Environmental Management. Very popular, I am!

I'm living in Ross on Wye in Herefordshire and looking forward to this year's reunion of the 1973 Chem Eng graduates (our fourth).



Roger Bassett (1974 BSc Metallurgy)

Following my graduation with First Class Honors, I married Christine and emigrated to Canada where we thought we might stay for "perhaps as long as three years." I worked at The Steel Company of Canada (Stelco), as a Metallurgist gaining experience in both steelmaking and the finishing mills. After being at Stelco for ten years I completed an MBA at McMaster University.

In 1998 we moved to the United States and in 1999 I was invited to join Plymouth Steel Corporation as President and Chief Operating Officer, where I continue to work to this day.

Christine and I will celebrate 35 years of marriage this year. Our life "overseas" has evolved in a different way than we would have planned but it has been good. We have three sons and four (soon to be five) grandchildren. As we look back over the years, the four years at Aston had by far the most influence on our lives.

We fell in love and grew up there. The modern Aston University campus was emerging from Central Tech the remnants of Victorian Gosta Green.

The successful development of the Aston University brand from the original technical school to an internationally renowned University with a full programme including business and science is a real credit to all the staff and all the alumni.

My work takes me all over the world. During one of my recent visits to China I was delighted to attend a dinner meeting of the Aston Beijing Alumni.

I had met Peter Thong in Beijing a couple of years before, and it was really quite by chance that we discussed our university careers and then realised we were both "Old Astonians." What a small world, when a Brummie who now lives in the USA meets a gentleman from Malaysia who now lives in China only to find out that they both rode the Paternosters at Aston as undergraduates.



James Franks (1976 MPhil Building)

In 1992 I retired from teaching aspects of construction management at London South Bank University after twenty years of teaching and moved into resolving disputes by mediation (www.disputes-resolved.co.uk) Much less costly and less disruptive of business relationships than litigation.

I am the author of four books, one in its third edition, and numerous articles, occasional papers etc., mainly on management and contractual matters. *My Building Contract Administration and Practice* (Batsford 1991, reprinted 1994) was probably the first such book to introduce alternative dispute resolution in a work intended for 'practitioners in building, architecture, surveying and related fields' and used as a course text.

My book entitled *Scram From Kenya* (www.scramfromkenya.co.uk) is concerned with the period 1946–1963 when Kenya moved from being a British colony and became a republic. As the introduction states, it aims to provide 'core-reading', an objective record of events during the period. My heart-felt wish is that it will find its way on to the shelves of all students of 20th Century history in East Africa and/or seeking a microcosm of events at the end of the British Empire. It has been well reviewed and I've produced a set of tutor's introductory notes to that end.



Ben Solomon (nee Anantha Balasundram 1979 BEng Electrical and Electronic Engineering)

Aston gave me a solid engineering background. Since graduating, I completed the MAOR (Lancaster, 1982) and MBS (University College Dublin, 1995). I have been doing statistical modeling of Residential & Commercial loan losses for GMAC and investment banks in the US this last five years.

Anushka, a poet, and I were married in 1989. We have a son, David, now 18. We accepted Christ, left Malaysia in 1998 and changed our names. I was Anantha Balasundram at Aston 1976–1979 and am now Benjamin Solomon.

Aston's solid engineering background gave me the vision to pursue researching gravity as an engineering subject this last ten years. In 2007 I discovered a new relationship for gravitational force, $g = \tau \cdot c^2$. τ is the change in time dilation over the change in distance. I am the author of "An Introduction to Gravity Modification." My goal is to build the propulsion technology that will get us to Alpha Centauri and back in our lifetimes. The future is beyond our imagination but not beyond our reach.

Where are they now?

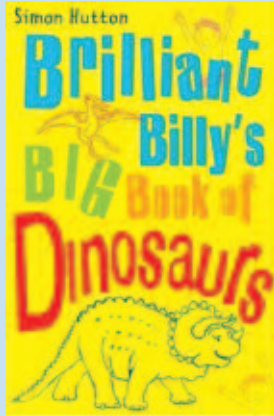
Itching to find out what your friends from Aston are up to? Looking to see who's up to what and with whom? Well look no further because 'Where are they now?' is the place to find out the latest news from Aston's thriving alumni network. If you want your face noticed in the autumn edition, email us at alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk with your news – and, go on, send a photograph!

80s



Simon Hutton (1988 BSc Electrical and Electronic Engineering)

I loved reading as a child, and as a teenager I consumed science fiction voraciously. My dual interest in science and the written word was clearly already there, but it was science and engineering that was to pull harder, and I read Electrical and Electronic Engineering at Aston – the degree, not the book! It was only once I began working in industry that I started writing again seriously.



I dabbled in all sorts of genres before eventually settling on children's books, and I was lucky enough to get *Brilliant Billy's Big Book of Dinosaurs* published, followed this year by *Brilliant Billy Does His Bit*. I still work in industry, but the dual interest remains and when I'm not engineering, I'm writing. Reflecting on my time at Aston, I can see how helpful my degree has been in both aspects of my life. I wasn't just learning about engineering I was learning about self-motivation, rigour, organising my thoughts and taking pride in my work.

Jonathan Hughes (1985 Combined Honours Computer Science/Physics, 1988 MBA)

I graduated with a BSc Combined Honours in Computing and Physics in the early 1980s – then came back to take my MBA part time in 1988 as I was living and working locally. The MBA allowed me to make the transition from computing into consulting and after a number of years learning the ropes as a consultant, I joined PA Consulting in 2001. In 2004, I was asked to move to the US to head up the Business Transformation Group for PA, and am now living in Washington DC with my family – Fran, James (11) and Anna (9). I work across the US in places as far away as Austin, Texas and travel back to the UK frequently. I am gradually getting used to the travel over here as well as enjoying the wide variation in weather (from way below zero in winter to over 100 degrees in the summer). I look back on my days at Aston fondly especially as it was where my wife and I met. Both degrees have allowed me to move my career forward and enabled me to have challenging and fruitful careers in both IT and consulting.

90s

Mahmoud Abu-Samra (1990 MSc TESP)

I worked as an English language instructor for 21 years then I joined the SAP project as an instructor/developer for all SAP functional areas in Saudi Aramco oil company since the year 2000 until now. I got certified in Business Intelligence 7.0 and Crystal Reports and as an Internal auditor. In addition, I developed a lot of Quality Management courses and gave courses to the company offices in Japan, The Netherlands and Houston, Texas.

This progress hasn't come from a vacuum. It is the strong foundation that I got from my studies at Aston. Let me catch this opportunity to remember Mr Keith Richards, the Director of the MSc Programme, and all the classmates of 1990.

Bruno Vincent (1999 MSc Pattern Analysis and Neural Networks)

I am currently living in France and in the summer of 2008 I set up my own business ITekia. This is an IT consulting company that specialise in information systems security and architecture (www.itekia.com). I have one partner and we hired our first employee in January. We are also expecting two more people in the next few months.

In 2007 I co-wrote a book about identity and access management called *Gestion des Identités*. I also teach IT architecture and security at the ENSTA and ENSIIE which are two 'Grandes Ecoles' or universities in Paris.

2000s



Rory Campbell (2000 MSc Risk Management and Safety Technology)

I studied at Aston in the late 90s whilst I was working as an instructor at the Fire Service College at Moreton in Marsh. My work there involved training emergency responders and emergency planners from hazardous industrial sites such as offshore oil rigs and chemical plants. My secondment to the college ended in 1999 and I returned to resume my career in West Midlands Fire Service (next to the University site at Lancaster Circus).

Since then I have worked in a number of roles starting with fire safety planning, where I monitored planning applications for large scale or complex buildings across Birmingham.

I went on to become station commander at various locations across the West Midlands, before undertaking another secondment – this time to work with Sandwell Education Authority, where I led a project to improve the management of fire safety in schools.

I served as district commander for Yardley for a while, before taking up my current role as manager of Integrated Risk Management which involves resource planning for the brigade.

I still get to respond fires and emergency incidents on a regular basis and test my risk management skills in a challenging environment.



Kirsty Oswald (née Sanders 2004 BSc MAS)

I can't believe it's nearly five years since I graduated from Aston. I had four great years there, but have been pretty busy since both work-wise and personally. After graduating I went back to work at Enterprise Rent-a-Car, where I was on placement, for about 18 months, but moved from there for a brief spell in sales before settling in IT for a travel firm in the summer of 2006.

January 2005 saw me buy my first home which I renovated a little and sold a year later to buy my current home in South Staffs with my 'then' boyfriend. The autumn of 2006 brought me an engagement ring and the wedding of my dreams followed in July 2007. Last year was mostly spent being pregnant until I gave birth to our son, Samuel Joseph, on October 30th. I currently love life as a full-time Mummy and housewife. People keep asking what we've got planned for 2009! I think we'll have a year off life changing events this year and enjoy what we've got.



Matt Roberts (2005 BSc Marketing)

During my final year at Aston University I co-founded www.Bean2Bed.com, with a fellow Aston graduate, Irfan Badakshi. We manufacture and market the ultimate guest bed solution – bean bags with beds inside. Since graduation the business has continued to grow from strength to strength both online and in retail outlets. The international business modules at uni have certainly come in useful as we are now exporting all over Europe on a weekly basis. In February 2009 I appeared on CBBCs 'Beat the Boss' and am about to be on the new series of Golden Balls with Jasper Carrott (a Bean2Bed customer!) Irfan and I are currently working on a range of football team branded Bean2Beds and are extremely positive about the future despite all the credit crunch related doom and gloom.

Ben Turner (2005 BSc Business and European Studies) and Ruth Turner (née Newson 2005 BSc Business Administration and Sociology)

Ben and Ruth married in August 2008 in a wonderful event at a fancy hotel just outside Rugby. Ben and Ruth met each other in the second year at Aston University and have been happily together ever since. Since graduation Ruth joined the Graduate Scheme at Halfords and now works in the Marketing Team whilst Ben has been working his way up the ranks at Copper Alloys in Stoke. On the wedding day many 2005 Aston Alumni were involved with the event: Marcus 'Slappy' Bennett (2005 BSc Marketing) was best man. Ellie Laho (2005 BSc Business Administration and Sociology) had the honour of being bridesmaid and Eddie Hughes (2005 BSc Marketing) was an usher. Phillip Dalloway (2005 BSc Business Computing and IT) was also kind enough to do a five minute stand-up comedy set to the amusement of everyone.



Go on, send your details in

If you would like to be featured in 'Where are they now?' in the autumn edition of *Apex*, please send some information about yourself either by email to alumniinfo@aston.ac.uk or by letter to: The Development & Alumni Relations Office, Aston University, Freepost BM2599/13, Birmingham, B4 6BR

Please include a picture – either post an original, which we will return, or email one at high resolution (250-300 dpi). We are waiting to hear from you – don't be afraid! (Deadline for receipt of information is August 2009).

Stay involved/get involved

Enjoying the magazine? Want to get involved with the University a bit more? If so, there is plenty going on and plenty of ways you can get involved. Here are just a few possibilities:

Offer a placement

Are you in a position to offer a student a work placement? Aston students are looking for paid and unpaid work, in the UK and internationally.

Approximately 30% of companies offer their placement students a job on graduation. Therefore the placement programme is a very efficient and cost effective way for employers to recruit graduates.

In addition, you may also benefit through having a fresh pair of eyes along with new and innovative ideas. This extra resource can provide input into projects which may be on your 'wish-list' of projects to get off the ground.

Recruit a graduate

If you are recruiting students or graduates, then Aston's Careers Service can help you to raise your profile. In 2008 we surveyed our students to find out how they prefer to meet employers and discuss job opportunities. Drop-ins and fairs turned out to be the most popular. The results of our survey have shaped the range of services for employers to help you meet your recruitment needs.

Host a reunion

Help set up an alumni group or organise a reunion. See our reunions and events page for details of what's happening in the next few months.

Tell a student about your time at Aston

Aston promotes its courses at exhibitions all over the world. These are often held at weekends and in the evenings. If you would like to help out at an exhibition in your area and talk to potential students about life at Aston please email the team.

Aston Alumni Association

InTouch

You'd like to find

A number of you take advantage of our Intouch service to track down long lost friends. Whilst many are happily reunited, others remain far more difficult to locate. Do you know any of the following people? If so, ask them to get in touch with us as an old friend is trying to contact them...

Alexandra Brailey
(2003 BSc Politics and Public Policy and Management)

Peter Gregory
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Peter Hall
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Richard Hubbard
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Mick Hugill
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Phil Lennon
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Terry Morgan
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

John Moseley
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Robert (Bob) Patterson
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Anthony Vickers
(1982 BSc Computing Science)

Steven Webb
(1982 BSc Managerial and Administrative Studies)

Russell Woolley
(1973 BSc Administrative Science)

Looking for someone at Aston?

If they aren't listed on our email directory at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni then contact us and we will see if we are in touch with them.

We'd like to find

We've lost touch with the following graduates. Do you know any of them? We need your help to track them down...

Peyman Adjamian
(2003 PhD Applied Psychology)

Evans Agbam
(2007 MSc Engineering Management)

Rebecca Anderson
(2006 BSc Maths and Business Administration)

Lea Brindle
(1980 MSc Applied Psychology)

Alexandros Chachou
(2002 BEng Mechanical Engineering)

Jill Collins
(2002 PhD Doctor of Philosophy)

Stuart Costigan
(2002 BSc European Studies/Business Admin)

Laurence Dellicott
(1998 BEng Electrical & Electronic Engineering)

Alison Fisher
(2004 PhD Applied Psychology)

Annette Hoare
(1989 BSc Ophthalmic Optics)

Al Hurlbut
(1999 MSc Information Technology)

Susan Joyce
(2003 MA Translation in a European Context)

Paminder Koasha
(2005 BSc Logistics)

Agnes Lariguet
(2006 MSc Marketing Management)

Peng Liu
(2005 BSc CH Maths and Business Administration)

Duvvuri Prakash
(2007 MSc Engineering Management)

Stuart Redmile
(2003 BSc Logistics)

Harjoga Samra
(2003 MPharm Pharmacy)

Nathan Smith
(2006 BSc Optometry – Matthew Boulton)

Nicholas Whitehouse
(2002 BSc Health & Safety Management/Environmental Science)

Benjamin Wiltshire
(2002 BSc Computing Science)

Yuk Wu
(1981 PhD Physics)

Bing Xu
(2006 MSc Business Studies)

Yani Zheng
(2006 BSc Public Policy & Management/Business Admin)

What we do for you

When you graduated from Aston you automatically became a member of the Aston Alumni Association. This free association comes with lots of benefits including:

Email directory

Looking for your friends or new contacts? Why not make our free Alumni Email Directory your first port of call?

Find a friend

Leaving Aston brings new experiences and often new locations, and you can lose touch with even the closest of friends. Your free InTouch Service can help put you back in contact with your friends from Aston.

Use the library

Aston University's library is open and available for all alumni. Using the library for reference is free, and membership with book loan is only £24.50.

Sports centre

Get fit for summer with our special alumni membership rate of £35 per month and enjoy activities such as swimming, aerobics and badminton.

Postgraduate study fee discounts

Enjoy discounts of up to 10% on postgraduate courses at Aston.

International groups

Be part of our international Aston Alumni Community by joining in activities arranged through our international chapters and partnerships with international organisations.

Careers advice

Use our award winning Careers Service for up to three years following graduation to get where you want to be in your career.

Social networking sites

Keeping in touch with us and other alumni couldn't be easier. We are on social networking sites Facebook (search for Aston University Alumni), LinkedIn (search for Aston University) and Xing (search for Aston University).

Reunions and events

See page 31 for a taster of what's coming up over the next few months.

Help you organise a reunion

We can help you organise an event from suggesting suitable venues and accommodation, to helping you contact old friends and publicise your event.

Accommodation on campus

Coming back to Birmingham for a reunion or maybe for business? Enjoy special alumni rates at the Aston Conference Centre

Conference and wedding venues

Enjoy alumni discounts on campus at Conference Aston for your future conference and wedding requirements.

Holidays

Thinking of going away? Check out our special alumni rates at our Best Western and Intercontinental hotels. With 15,000 properties across Europe, Cottages4you will let you escape from it all with your very own discounted holiday retreat.

Car hire and parking

Enjoy alumni discounts with car parking at APH and Parking4Less. Need to hire a car? Check out our great rates at National Car Rental.

Magazine subscriptions

Want to take some time out? Aston alumni can take advantage of the lowest prices available on subscriptions to magazines such as The Economist, National Geographic, Time, Vogue, Prospect, New Scientist and many many more.

For more information about any of these benefits go to www.aston.ac.uk/alumni

All offers are subject to terms and conditions. The University provides no guarantees or warranties in relation to the quality or suitability of any services offered by third parties, nor in relation to the accuracy or reliability of advertisements placed by them and accepts no responsibility or liability whatsoever in relation to such services.

In Memoriam

The University extends its sincere condolences to the friends and families of those listed below, who passed away this year.

Stanley Arthur Ray (1943 BSc Chemistry)

Stanley Arthur Ray, chemist, linguist, devotee of Shakespeare as written by Marlow and music lover from Jazz to the classics, sadly passed away in February 2009. A former member of the Standing Committee of Convocation, he studied chemistry at the then Birmingham Central Technical College and his career took him all over Europe. A tireless worker for the Royal Institute of Chemistry and the Royal Society of Chemistry, he served on main and local committees and was the welfare representative for many years. Stan served as a British delegate to the European Standards Committee for paint and varnish technology. If chemistry was his career, linguistics was his love, particularly French. He was a natural scholar and academic and was never happier than when dealing with an awkward translation. If he were here he would be saying "au revoir à bientôt."

Raymond Evans

Ray Evans sadly passed away in November 2008. His association with Aston University dates back to 1937 when he embarked on a night school course in metallurgy at the then Birmingham Central Technical College to support his apprenticeship in the iron founding industry. His studies were interrupted when he volunteered to become a navigator in the RAF. He subsequently returned to study in 1946 and qualified as an Associate of the then College of Technology in 1952. When the College received its University Charter, Ray was awarded a Bachelor of Science degree.

Throughout his life Ray was an active member of Aston Graduates' Association and held several different posts on its committee. He was also elected to the Standing Committee of Convocation and served as its Chairman for 15 years. He represented Aston on a number of external committees and, in 2002, was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of his contribution to the University and industry. A committed and enthusiastic supporter of Aston, Ray will be long remembered by all who knew and worked with him.



Siân Rowland (1999 BSc European Studies with German)

Former European Studies student, Siân Rowland, died unexpectedly in her sleep on 19 December in Vienna, Austria, aged 33. Siân had lived in Vienna for more than 10 years since she graduated from Aston University.

Siân was the European Handball Federation's Corporate Communications Manager, responsible for the Federation's communications and media strategy as well as dealing with the international sports press and media. Only a few months before her death, Siân had worked at the Beijing Olympic Games as a media manager for the Olympic handball competition.

Siân attended Higher Lane Primary School and Philips High School, Whitefield, and sixth form at Holy Cross College, Bury. She spent a year in Namibia before going to university.

A funeral service was held in Haslingden, Lancashire and a memorial service in Vienna, both of which were attended by many family members, friends and colleagues from across the UK, Europe and worldwide.

Reunions – a Global Community

Aston graduates are based all over the world and we are always delighted to report your meetings and activities in *Apex*.

1 Japan reunion

Aston alumni based in Japan were reunited last year at a reception also attended by Aston University's Director of Marketing, Stewart Comfort.

2 Shanghai reunion

A gathering by Aston Alumni in Shanghai was attended by Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Graham Hooley.

3 Pharmacy 40 year reunion

Forty years after graduation 23 pharmacy graduates met up and reminisced about their time at Aston and caught up on what they are up to now. Professor Keith Wilson kindly agreed to show them around the old Pharmacy rooms. The picture shows the Pharmacy class in 1968.

That evening the graduates, partners and former lecturer Mike Jepson went for dinner. "If the long conversations and loud laughter into the early hours are any indication of enjoyment, then we certainly had a great time! Community, hospital and industrial pharmacists all exchanged stories and memories. We had a fantastic time as undergraduates but it was obvious we had enjoyed our professional careers as well. Thank you Aston!"

4 Athens reunion

Nancy Messih and Navdeep Uppal from Aston Business School's Postgraduate programme hosted a dinner for MBA and MSc alumni living in Athens. This was a great opportunity for alumni to meet up, network and find out the latest news from Aston University.

5 Handsworth Hall 20 year reunion

Twenty years after arriving in Birmingham as Freshers to study at Aston, friends from Handsworth Hall returned to the city for their 20-year reunion. The group met at The Jamhouse in the Jewellery Quarter which became their 'Bin' for the night. 'The Bin' was the nickname for the Village Inn pub on site at the Handsworth Residences where Freshers' Week took over in October 1988. Ten years later they returned for a get together at an old city centre favourite, the Happy Gathering restaurant. This year's reunion coincided with the Conservative Party conference, which meant sharing a hotel with Tories young and old and TV news crews covering either the conference or Aston reunion – who knows?

6 Korea reunion

Aston alumni based in Korea got together in Seoul.

7 Biological Sciences 30 year reunion

In May 2008 eleven graduates reunited from the 1978 Biological Sciences course.

8 Thailand reunions

This past year has seen two reunions in Bangkok. In August alumni joined together with Professor David Bennett from Aston Business School.

In February there was another successful reunion with Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alison Halstead, meeting alumni in central Bangkok.

9 Aston Beijing Alumni (ABA)

The alumni network in Beijing have had a busy year, with many events taking place. Here are just a few highlights:

The ABA Summer Think Tank

On a Friday evening in July, Aston alumni had a wonderful time updating each other on the latest issues in the world, especially China, regarding business, economics, climatic changes, careers etc and, of course, Aston! Members met at Xiao Wang Fu's, a quaint restaurant right in the heart of the Central Business District in Beijing.

ABA dinner

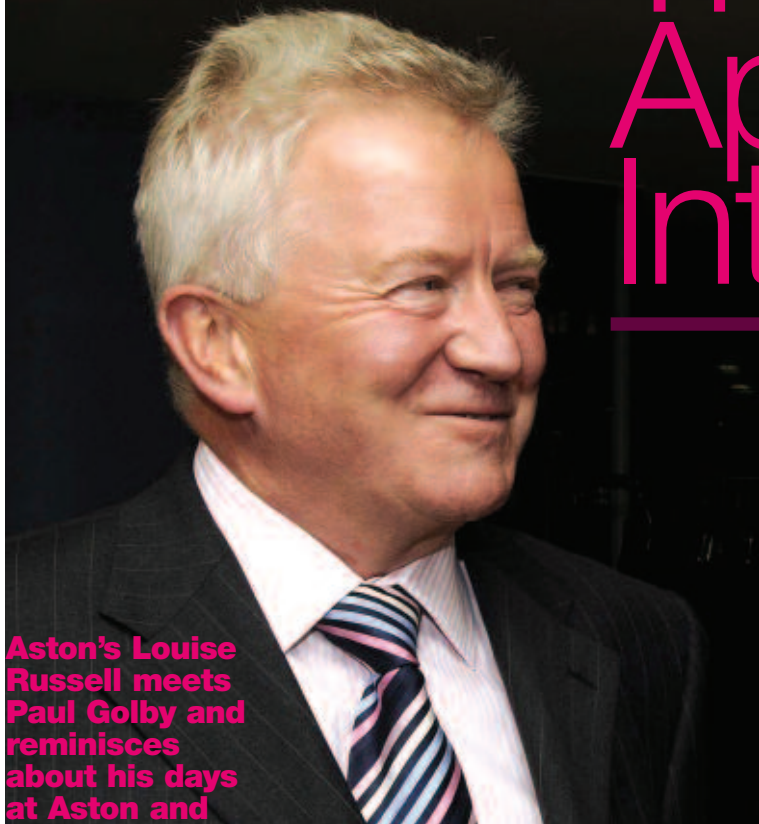
In January 2009, ABA welcomed the Director of the ABS MSc Programme, Kathryn Priest, to Beijing for the New Year dinner.

Fondue memories

Over 250 graduates came back to relive their memories in the Guild in July 2008. A good time was had by graduates from 2004-2007 who met once again and spent the evening catching up and dancing in the Guild. Did you graduate between 2005-2008? Fancy reliving those student days? Why not book a ticket to this year's Guild party on Saturday 27 June.

Further details at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni





Aston's Louise Russell meets Paul Golby and reminisces about his days at Aston and what advice he gives to the next generation of graduates.

The Apex Interview

Aston alumnus, Paul Golby, Chief Executive of E.ON UK, was appointed Pro-Chancellor and Chair of the University's Council at the end of 2008.

Paul gained both a first class honours degree in Mechanical Engineering and a PhD at Aston. He was awarded an Honorary Degree by the University in 2007.

I chatted to Paul to find out more about the man who has led E.ON UK through two multi-billion pound acquisitions and to hear his ideas for guiding Aston's future.

How do you feel your external role at E.ON and your career history to date affects your suitability for the Pro-Chancellor role?

Personally I had a great time at Aston and I really wanted to give something back. When I came here as an undergraduate student I never imagined that I would get the job that I have got. It just demonstrates that if you get a good degree, have imagination and determination, you can do whatever you want to do.

How does my external role equip me for the job? Well, I run a large organisation with 18,000 staff in the UK so I know the complexities of running a large organisation. I also chair the board at E.ON so I know how the dynamics of a board of directors works. I'm also quite actively engaged in the political and external arena so one of the biggest things I can bring to the Council in addition to chairmanship and organisational skills is external help with representation – making connections, talking to people and raising the profile of Aston as a really exciting place to be.

Did your experiences at Aston help your career?

Firstly, I came from a working class family and frankly I had never been away from home until I came to university, so the pure social environment was a fantastic experience. The quality of the teaching while I was here was really good and there were numerous inspiring lecturers. Aston equipped me well, so like Aston students today, I had lots of opportunities for employment. It really kickstarted my career.

Is there a particular memory that sticks out for you?

Too many – with numerous involving the bar in the Students' Guild! The scary thing is that when I was here I just missed out on getting a place in the new halls of residences – Dalton, Stafford and Lawrence Towers – because they weren't finished. So to come back and be told that the towers were old and were being demolished really made me think about how long it had been since I was here!

How do you think links with industry impact on the work of universities?

The relationship is absolutely critical. Industry has two roles to play. Firstly, it can be a great source of funding and of opportunity. Businesses can also be the recipients of excellent research as well as the people of course. In a sense universities are the feedstock for industry in providing high calibre staff so I think that industry can also be the vehicle through which research is turned into reality. That for me is a key component of the relationship. Great research on its own is fine but great research that is turned into a tangible benefit whether it is economic or social – that's the real test.

What do you see as the biggest challenge universities face in the next few years?

Government funding for universities is going to be quite tough. The universities that succeed will need to work very hard on research, research excellence and building an external reputation. One thing Aston does have is gems – as you go round the University you will see lots of exciting things happening. Aston has lots going for it and we need to keep building a reputation for research excellence in order to obtain critical funding. We also need to preserve our reputation for employability and as a great place for students to study. If we maintain this, we'll continue attracting great students.

Do you have any advice for our graduates in 2009 in the current economic climate?

Stay flexible. Think big and be determined. The best people will still get good jobs. It's a matter of being out there, not losing confidence and taking the knock backs. The more determined you are, the more you'll succeed.

Forthcoming Events

Here is just a snapshot of events happening in the next few months, for more information go to www.aston.ac.uk/alumni.

1 June 2009

The European Union of States: Geopolitics and Values

Professor Michael Sutton's Inaugural Lecture.

15 June 2009

Reunion in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Come along to an informal reunion in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and meet fellow alumni. This event also provides a good opportunity to meet Aston University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor Phil Extance.

16 June 2009

Adapt or Die

The presentation by Bernard Savage (Managing Director, Size 10 Boots) will focus on ways to market yourself successfully during the recession. This event is run in with the Association of MBAs and is only open to MBA graduates.

27 June 2009

Reunite in the Guild

Graduated between 2004 – 2008? If so, then why not come back and relive those memories from the Guild with this year's reunion. Tickets are £7 each with special rate accommodation available with Conference Aston from £30 for a single occupancy bed and breakfast room.

14 October 2009

Dealing with the Media and Crisis Management

The presentation, given by George Davis (Recognition Marketing and PR LLP) will focus on PR, dealing with the Media, the impact of new media on PR, Media Law and Crisis and Reputation Management. This event is run in with the Association of MBAs and is only open to MBA graduates.

December

London Christmas Pub Reunion

Come along for a Christmas drink and meet fellow alumni and members of the Development & Alumni Relations team. Entrance is free. From 5.30pm onwards.

International events are held through out the year – keep an eye on our website for ones coming up in your area.

Missed an event?

Not able to make it back to Aston, or have you missed a lecture? Read summaries, see images and watch videos of past inaugural and guest lectures for free at www.aston.ac.uk/about/news/events/past-events/

Training – Management and Leadership Courses

Improve your skills with this free course for all graduates based in the West Midlands. The course, run by Graduate Advantage, introduces delegates to the different characteristics and skills it takes to be an effective manager and leader. It also allows delegates to gain an awareness of different leadership and management styles including their own. The one day courses will be held on Friday 3 July and Wednesday 29 July. For more information and to book please go to www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/reunions/events/

Have we got your details?

Ensure you receive your invitation to forthcoming events with our online update form at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/update

To keep costs down, many events are now promoted only via email. Let us keep in contact with you by giving us your email address.

University events and lectures are being held on campus through out the year. Further details can be found at www.aston.ac.uk/about/news/events/

Can't get back to campus?

You can listen again to past lectures at www.aston.ac.uk/about/news/events/past-events/

If you are thinking of having a reunion on campus, then why not take advantage of the special alumni rates at four star accommodation at Conference Aston. Go to www.aston.ac.uk/alumni

Keep up-to-date with what's happening in your country, by joining our e-groups. Further information can be found at www.aston.ac.uk/alumni

A Golden Opportunity

Make your money go further

A new government scheme will mean that for the next three years all individual gifts to Aston University will receive support from the UK Government (in addition to Gift Aid). Regardless of where you are based, the £200million 'Matched Funding' scheme adds government money to individual donations to UK universities on a 2:1 basis. **So, from 1 August 2008, Aston will receive an extra £1 from the UK Government for every £2 you donate.** This means that a £20 donation is worth £30 to us – a golden opportunity to make your money go further.

"This is an exciting time of growth and renewal at Aston. We are working to establish ourselves as a top 10 UK university whilst retaining our core value: delivering accessible excellence. Donations make an enormous difference in our ability to do this, which makes the Matched Funding scheme particularly welcome."

Professor Julia King, Vice-Chancellor

www.aston.ac.uk/alumni/matchedfunding/

