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INTRODUCTION



The *Times Higher Education* Leadership and Management Awards are a celebration of excellence for individuals and teams, but our hope is that they can also serve as an inspiration for the wider higher education sector.

Within these pages are examples of exceptional performance in the most important areas of university leadership, management and administration. At a time of ever greater competition in higher education, our hope is that the case studies offered by our award winners will also encourage collaboration and ever greater creativity, with institutions learning from one another to improve the quality of what they do across the board.

Anyone working in a university will know how dedicated and resourceful their colleagues are, but it's our great honour to be able to shine a light on these examples from across the UK.

We've seen some exceptional performances and projects put forward for the Thelmas this year, giving our judges one of their toughest tests yet. Congratulations once again to all our winners.

John Gill, editor, *Times Higher Education*





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JUDGES



Matthew Andrews	University secretary and registrar, University of Gloucestershire
Alasdair Cameron	Executive director, AURIL, and director, West of Scotland KTP Centre
Chris Cobb	Pro vice-chancellor and chief operating officer, University of London
Sir Cary Cooper	50th anniversary professor of organisational psychology and health, Alliance Manchester Business School
Liesl Elder	Chief development officer, University of Oxford
Patrick Finch	Bursar and director of estates, University of Bristol
Sir Deian Hopkin	Former vice-chancellor, London South Bank University
Alison Johns	Chief executive, Leadership Foundation for Higher Education
Maja Maricevic	Head of higher education, British Library
Stephanie Marshall	Chief executive, Higher Education Academy
Joanna Newman	Secretary general, Association of Commonwealth Universities
Hari Punchihewa	Deputy chief executive and finance director, University of Derby
Andrew West	Secretary, University of Sheffield

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- #8 What works in higher education?
- #9 Part of a great community
- #10 View from the top

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OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT TEAM

UNIVERSITY OF WEST LONDON

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The University of West London is a worthy winner of this year's top prize, having delivered sustained improvements across the institution and impressive outcomes for students.

Underpinned by its Ambition 2018 action plan, the university has delivered against numerous challenging goals set in 2013, with 90 per cent of key performance indicators achieved two years ahead of schedule.

Some 96 per cent of UWL students now find employment within six months of graduating – 4 per cent better than the institution's benchmark – while the university remains in the top 30 for UK starting salaries. Overall, 69 per cent of graduates enter highly skilled employment, rising to 71 per cent for black students and 85 per cent for mature students, the highest figures for any modern university in London.

National Student Survey satisfaction scores have remained high and are, at 84 per cent in 2015-16, among the best in London.

UWL also managed to increase its student enrolments by 22 per cent in the two years to 2016-17, while almost doubling its postgraduate entrant numbers over the same period. Financial performance has been strong, too: UWL's surplus was 11 per cent in 2015-16, at the same time as it was investing £120 million in its estate.

UWL showed "improved performance across a range of indicators, which was both impressive and compelling", according to the judges.

The university was an excellent example of "a committed and enduring leadership team working effectively with its board, staff and students", they said.

Excellence rewarded

We believe that institutions with distinctive and innovative teaching and learning strategies that reflect core values and enhance both the student and staff experience should be celebrated.

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TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGY OF THE YEAR

UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

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The University of Essex's drive to achieve "parity of esteem" between teaching and research earned it the Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year award.

In 2015-16, the university's annual Education Action Plan set out 10 priority actions, including reviews of curricula, delivery and assessment. The student experience was improved with new mentoring schemes, a personal tutoring system and new student engagement interns to improve induction.

Essex also prioritised support for academic staff to focus on students. This involved helping staff to maximise use of educational technology, and streamlining course design, development and approval processes. To develop the link between teaching and research, in 2015-16 the university introduced within all courses a requirement that students undertake a significant research project – ensuring that they demonstrate the research mindset and skills "integral to being an Essex graduate".

Recognising a variance across subjects on key student metrics, the university created a central team to work with departments to address problem areas and share good practice, resulting in immediate improvements in National Student Survey scores.

The judges said that Essex's strategy was "underpinned by a clear educational philosophy, which was to make a demonstrable impact on student learning outcomes...The valuing of teaching was driven up through a combination of staff reward and recognition schemes, alongside staff engagement in the university's Higher Education Academy-accredited continuing professional development scheme."

The judges added that the strategy provided a blueprint to measure "distance travelled" from the start of a student's academic career, with "impressive results" shown in the quality of teaching for students.



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KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE/ TRANSFER INITIATIVE OF THE YEAR

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY

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When Seven Stories: The National Centre for Children's Books wanted to appeal to a wider audience but lacked the expertise to do so, it reached out to Newcastle University's School of English Literature, Language and Linguistics.

The pair created what is believed to be the world's first English literature knowledge transfer partnership, which provides a model for knowledge transfer in the arts and humanities.

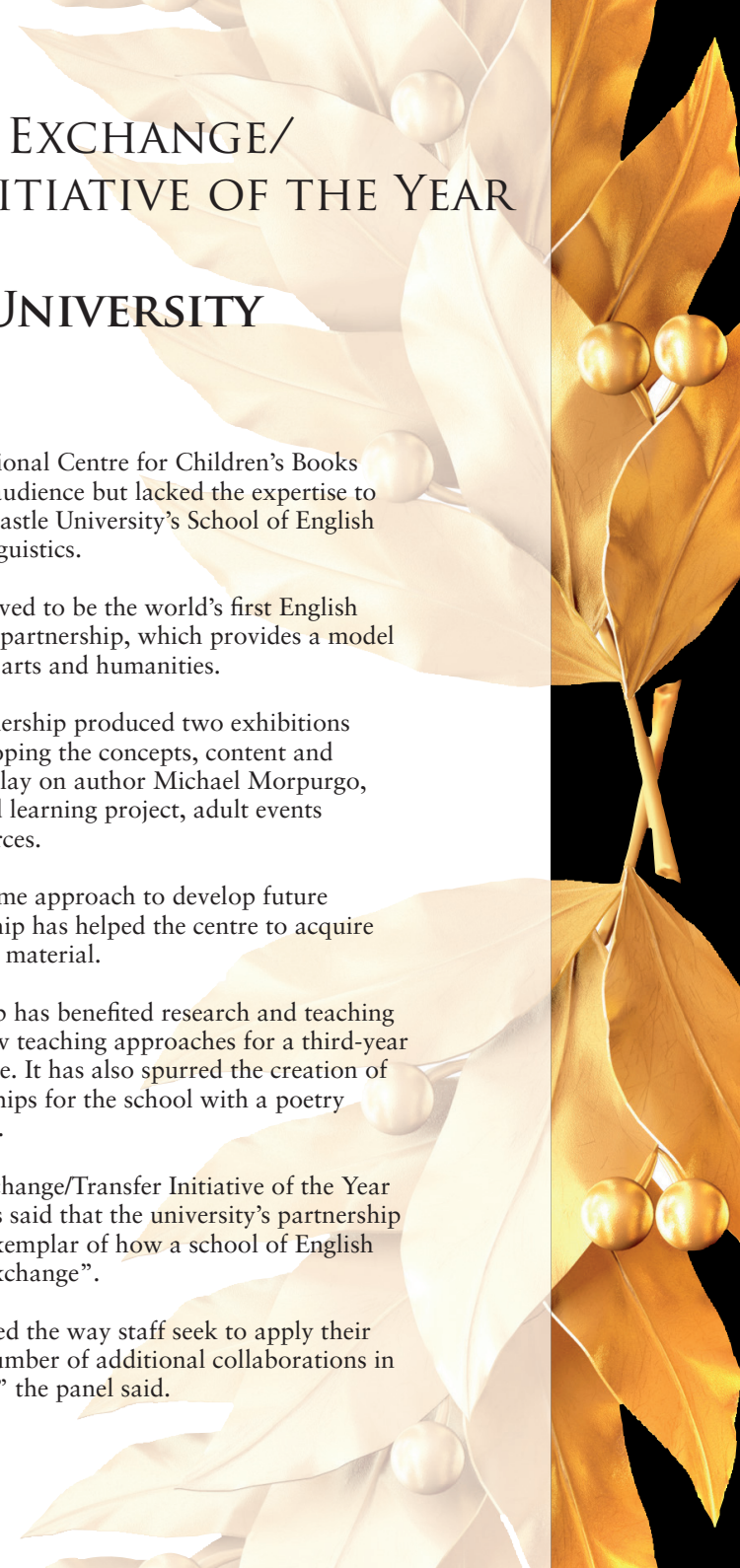
The knowledge transfer partnership produced two exhibitions at the centre, including developing the concepts, content and interpretation of a major display on author Michael Morpurgo, as well as instigating a related learning project, adult events programme and digital resources.

Seven Stories now uses the same approach to develop future exhibitions, and the partnership has helped the centre to acquire additional prestigious archive material.

At Newcastle, the relationship has benefited research and teaching in several areas, including new teaching approaches for a third-year module on children's literature. It has also spurred the creation of two new knowledge partnerships for the school with a poetry publisher and a house builder.

Awarding the Knowledge Exchange/Transfer Initiative of the Year prize to Newcastle, the judges said that the university's partnership with Seven Stories was "an exemplar of how a school of English could engage in knowledge exchange".

"The initiative has transformed the way staff seek to apply their knowledge and unlocked a number of additional collaborations in the area of English literature," the panel said.



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OUTSTANDING DIGITAL INNOVATION OF THE YEAR

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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Developing technology that enables distance-learning students to conduct laboratory work remotely secured the Outstanding Digital Innovation of the Year title for the Open University.

The OU's OpenSTEM Labs project enables learners to connect online to technical equipment such as microscopes, robotic rovers, telescopes and a satellite.

At a time that suits them, students are also able to remotely conduct experiments in environments including a mountain-top observatory, a cloud chamber and a "Mars landscape".

The project overcomes many of the obstacles that the OU has traditionally faced around laboratory work, which have increased as restrictions on what can be sent out in home-learning kits have mounted.

It was funded by a £2.8 million grant from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which was matched by the OU. Several hundred hours of use have already been logged, and new courses in electronics and space science are due to start utilising the OpenSTEM Labs next year.

In the future, the OU plans partnerships with other universities and outside organisations to maximise use of the technology, dubbed an "Internet of Laboratory Things".

The judges described the OpenSTEM Labs project as a "highly deserving winner".

"This innovation has far-ranging implications, not only for distance learners but also in maximising the use, impact and return on investment in specialist equipment," the panel said.



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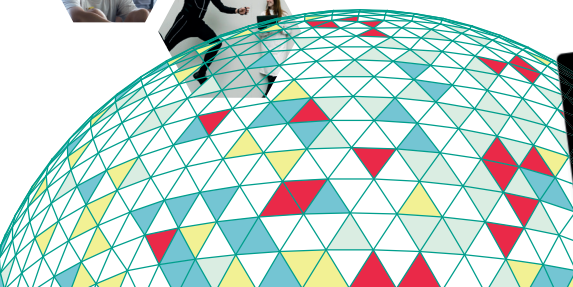
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OUTSTANDING MARKETING/ COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Cybersecurity is increasingly at the top of the news agenda, as shown by recent events such as the worldwide ransomware attack in May that highlighted vulnerabilities in the NHS.

However, the prospects for tackling this huge threat have been enhanced by the University of Gloucestershire's success in developing its computing offer and massively boosting the number of students studying courses in this area – an achievement that led to its taking the Outstanding Marketing/Communications Team title.

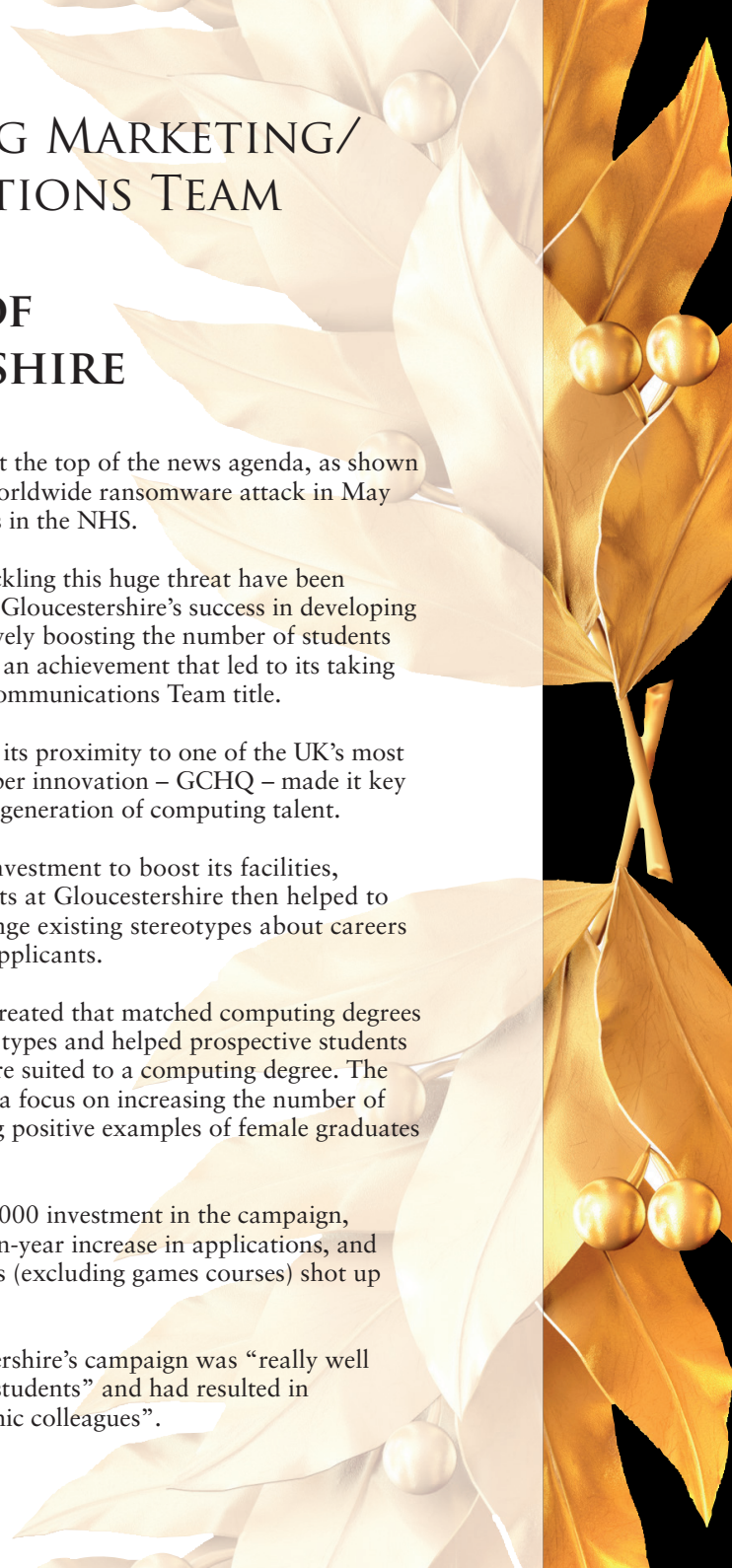
Gloucestershire identified that its proximity to one of the UK's most important organisations in cyber innovation – GCHQ – made it key to helping to educate the next generation of computing talent.

After the university secured investment to boost its facilities, academics and current students at Gloucestershire then helped to develop a campaign to challenge existing stereotypes about careers in computing and to attract applicants.

An online questionnaire was created that matched computing degrees to a series of eight personality types and helped prospective students to identify how their skills were suited to a computing degree. The marketing drive also included a focus on increasing the number of female applicants by providing positive examples of female graduates in computing careers.

Despite a relatively small £20,000 investment in the campaign, there was a 40 per cent year-on-year increase in applications, and demand for computing courses (excluding games courses) shot up by 113 per cent.

The judges said that Gloucestershire's campaign was "really well targeted for their prospective students" and had resulted in "excellent buy-in from academic colleagues".





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OUTSTANDING ESTATES STRATEGY

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

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The University of Sheffield was described by the judges as being a “worthy winner” of the estates and facilities management category for exhibiting “great creativity” and successfully “uniting university and city in common goals to improve the environment and public realm of Sheffield”.

At the heart of its success and key to unlocking its wider strategy in 2015-16 was the opening of The Diamond, an £81 million project that represents the institution’s largest-ever capital investment in teaching and learning. Central to Sheffield’s plans for engineering, it will support the recruitment of about 1,600 extra undergraduate students while providing state-of-the-art facilities and equipment.

The 2015-16 academic year also saw the opening of Factory 2050, described by Sheffield as the “world’s first fully reconfigurable factory”, as well as the initial development of ambitious plans for an advanced manufacturing research campus.

Meanwhile, work started on a project in partnership with Sheffield City Council to transform public spaces around the university by improving pedestrian walkways and crossings, creating safe cycle routes, planting new trees and plants, and integrating public art into the area.

The project – boosted by £3 million from a Sheffield regional investment fund and £5 million from the university – has also helped to remove cars from the centre of the campus and to improve local bus routes.

The judges said that Sheffield came top in a year with a “number of very strong submissions” owing to its “successful transition from innovative thinking around the formulation of its estates strategy through detailed planning to implementation on the ground, which is now well advanced”.

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OUTSTANDING ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES TEAM

UNIVERSITY OF HULL

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Our judges said that this year's winning entrant, the University of Hull, embodied the ideals for best practice in sector registry teams by offering outstanding services while remaining cost effective.

At the heart of Hull's entry was the creation of its AskHU central administration service. Before the establishment of AskHU, Hull students had numerous points of access to student services. For example, teams covering finance, registry, immigration, accommodation and health and well-being each had their own area in the students' union building – an inefficient set-up that students found time-consuming.

AskHU pulled all these services together to make a single point of access for students. It also supported staff by introducing a buddy system, which allowed people to shadow others to learn how to help with questions on unfamiliar areas.

The new system includes a bespoke appointment management system, and better and more varied methods of engagement with students.

The change has proved so successful that Hull's careers and study-abroad teams have been incorporated into the service, allowing the university to pool financial resources and cut costs.

"The AskHU central administration service...epitomises best practice in the sector's approach to one-stop shops for student support, including a buddy system for staff support and an appointment manager booking system for students," the judging panel noted. "Not only has the new service received a 96 per cent satisfaction score, but it has saved the university money, too."



Times Higher Education Leadership & Management Awards 2017

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winners and nominees.**

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OUTSTANDING FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

UNIVERSITY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

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The University of Gloucestershire's turnaround in moving from "survival to stability" landed it the Outstanding Financial Performance award.

The achievement was underpinned by the institution's adherence to "robust" triennial finance strategies that set "stretching" financial performance targets.

The year 2015-16 was the first of a new financial strategy, with key indicators on liquidity, gearing, surpluses, pay and diversification of incomes embedded in monthly reporting.

An explicit push to improve services for students has been a key driver, with students receiving quicker responses to queries. Also achieved was a reduction in the number of emergency loans to students, owing to fewer late Student Loans Company payments.

During 2015-16, Gloucestershire signed a student residential scheme contract with a private provider, funded through a bond issue, making it one of the first universities of its size and type to complete such a deal.

After a new procurement manager was appointed from outside the sector, the university also undertook a complete overhaul of procurement, making it an exemplar in its peer group. It introduced a system of "procurement champions", whereby volunteers from across the university stepped up as experts and assisted their peers. An e-tendering portal was also implemented, providing a modern and efficient facility for suppliers and the university.

The judges said that they were impressed by "the turnaround initiated by a relatively small team through radical change of processes, a culture of strict adherence to key financial measures [and] focus on key performance indicators", all achieving a "substantial improvement in overall financial stability".

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WORKPLACE OF THE YEAR

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

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The University of Strathclyde, winner of the Workplace of the Year title, was praised by our judges for demonstrating a strong commitment to supporting staff at all levels.

From its introduction of the “living wage” in 2015, when it also banned zero-hours contracts, to bespoke development programmes for academic, technical, administrative and leadership staff, Strathclyde’s “progressive strategy” showed how highly its 3,500 staff were valued and supported, according to the panel.

Examples of excellent practice included the chancellor’s fellowship scheme, which recruited 25 fellows in 2015-16 and 20 in early 2017, matching each of them with an academic mentor; and the professional services graduate training scheme, offering graduate trainees a series of four-month placements in different faculty and professional service areas.

Sustained action on improving gender equality, such as the introduction of family-friendly research leave and family-friendly mentoring, were also commended, as was the creation of a long-service award for those clocking up 25 and 40 years’ work at the institution.

Reduced staff turnover and lower sickness absence were just a couple of the benefits accrued to the university from its efforts, with results of staff surveys improving dramatically between 2013 and 2016.

Strathclyde was lauded by the judges for its “impressive employee engagement across the board”, noting that 97 per cent of staff respondents considered the university to be a people-oriented employer, up from 89 per cent in 2013.

“This is a university with a clear vision, whose values are in evidence across all levels of the institution,” said our judges.



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OUTSTANDING STUDENT ADMISSIONS STRATEGY

SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY

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Sheffield Hallam University topped the Outstanding Student Admissions Strategy category with a truly collaborative approach to recruitment.

The institution exceeded recruitment targets for 2016, with undergraduate acceptances increasing by 1 per cent in the context of a 4 per cent decline in applications, and UK and European Union-domiciled acceptances at postgraduate level growing by 4 per cent. This was achieved owing, in part, to an 18 per cent increase in school and college engagement, reaching more than 39,000 students, three-quarters of whom were from low-participation neighbourhoods.

Sheffield Hallam established a student-led call centre to support prospective applicants, leading to record numbers of enquirers booking an open day, and developed an “always on” approach to social media, with a particular focus on student-led video content: the institution’s videos reached 14.2 million people in 2016, up 211 per cent year-on-year.

Innovative support was provided for students from under-represented backgrounds, including outreach work in faith centres, interview preparation workshops and one-to-one application advice.

For 2,608 children aged under 16, the institution also laid on roadshows, which were brought to life by a zombie apocalypse-themed presentation.

The judges said that they were “impressed by the joint approach to student recruitment that brought together colleagues from the recruitment, marketing, admissions, alumni and communications teams”.

“Through using best practice techniques, including student-led call centres and multiple digital channels, as well as an imaginative approach to roadshows, such as a zombie apocalypse-themed presentation for under-16s, the student admissions strategy has supported the university’s ambition to transform student lives.”



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THE DATAPOINTS MERIT AWARD

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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This year, *THE*'s DataPoints team focused on an assessment of global indicators, looking at international recognition and collaboration.

The shortlist was made up of universities displaying a high percentage of international collaboration across all their published research as well as consistently high scores in *THE*'s Academic Reputation Survey. We looked at the geographical diversity of the votes, meaning that universities with votes coming from an array of countries were selected.

We wanted to reward a global institution tackling relevant issues from a variety of angles, and have awarded the University of Sussex this 2017 *THE* DataPoints Merit Award for its long and prolific history of interdisciplinary research.

Among the many research groups at Sussex, two exemplify a forward-thinking interdisciplinary approach: the Science Policy Research Unit (SPRU) and the Centre for Cognitive Science (COGS).

SPRU, which celebrated its 50th anniversary last year, brings together economics, technology and policy and has been ranked second, after Harvard University (with whom the Harvard Sussex Program on limiting chemical and biological weapons is run), for research impact in innovation. It was also ranked seventh by the University of Pennsylvania's 2016 Global Go To Think Tank Index Report, in its list of top science and technology thinktanks.

COGS, founded by cognitive scientist and philosopher Margaret Boden, is another example of interdisciplinary research in a field that is becoming more relevant every year. Under the broad umbrella of cognitive sciences are gathered researchers in artificial intelligence, neuroscience, psychology, linguistics and philosophy, tackling the central issue of the nature of the mind and thought.



OUTSTANDING LIBRARY TEAM

COVENTRY UNIVERSITY

International students face many challenges in adjusting to university life in the UK, yet one that is seldom considered is the difficulty they may experience in making the most effective use of the library.

Many international students have little or no prior experience of using libraries and are often overwhelmed by the range of resources and services available. In addition, some miss the standard induction process through arriving late because of visa issues.

Coventry University won this year's Outstanding Library Team title for its efforts to address this issue head-on via its Pre-Arrival Library Support (Pals) website.

A focus group and survey revealed that many international students came from countries where students were not expected to read around their subjects, had limited access to e-resources, and were unable to carry out printing and photocopying.

To bridge these knowledge gaps, therefore, the library created a series of PDFs offering a glossary of library terms and introducing the services and facilities available, alongside information on how to get help and how to find books. Making the documents available on the Pals website has effectively given international students equal access to all the university's library services. The website has now been accessed more than 25,000 times.

The judges were "impressed by the project's effective way of reaching across the university and achieving the widest possible impact. The support activities provided by the library showed real understanding of issues facing international students and found their way to address them in a simple yet innovative way."

OUTSTANDING STRATEGIC PLANNING TEAM

UNIVERSITY OF STRATHCLYDE

The University of Strathclyde's winning entry was centred on a new bespoke system to track student applications that was designed to help increase the number of enrolled students from deprived areas.

The system allowed university staff to view applications against targets for a range of student types. This information was then used to calculate the impact of different offer-making strategies on conversion rates for different applicants. One key finding was that applicants from the most deprived areas were more likely to accept an unconditional offer but much less likely to get one than those from less deprived areas.

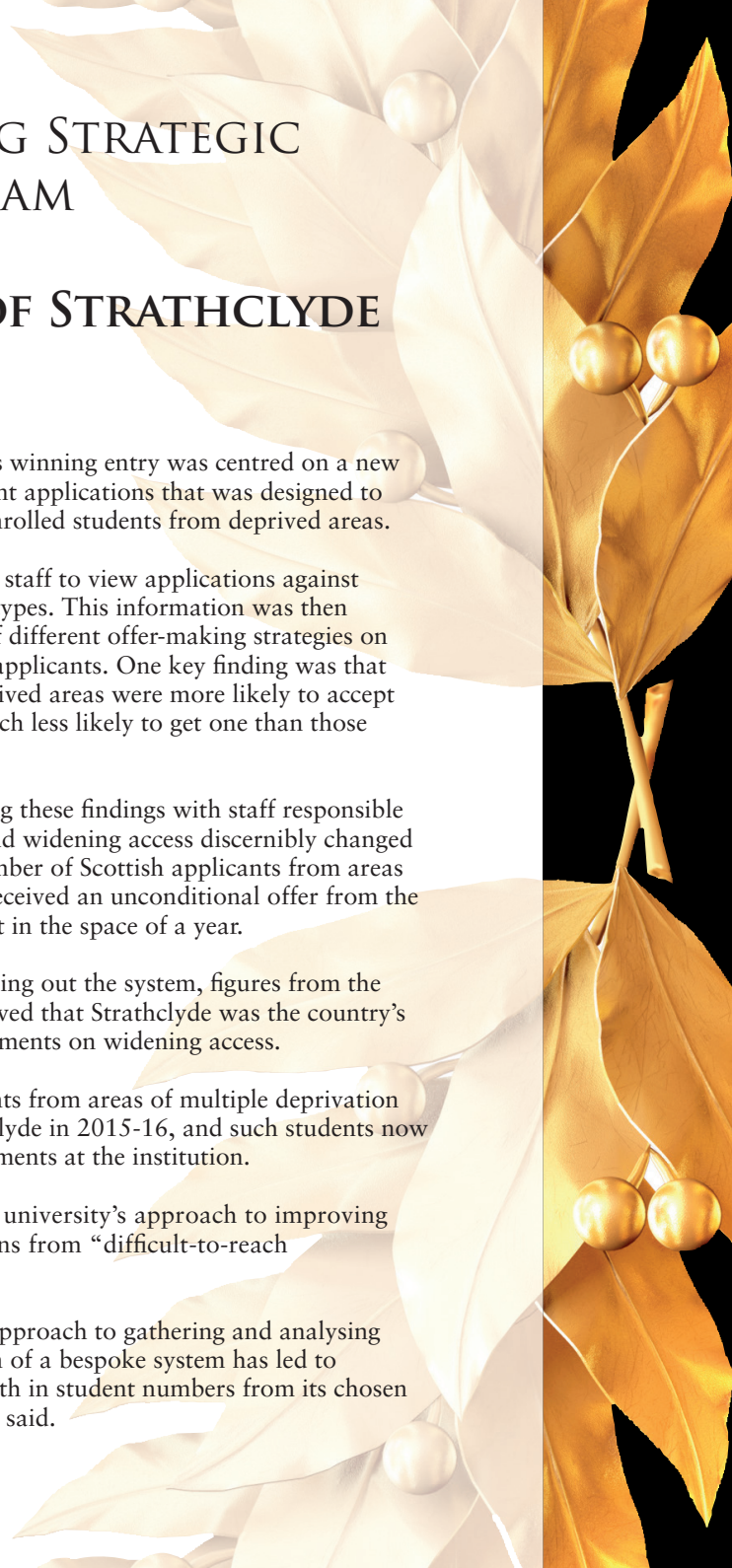
The university said that sharing these findings with staff responsible for recruitment, admissions and widening access discernibly changed behaviour. As a result, the number of Scottish applicants from areas of multiple deprivation who received an unconditional offer from the institution grew by 30 per cent in the space of a year.

Meanwhile, one year after rolling out the system, figures from the Scottish Funding Council showed that Strathclyde was the country's leading university for improvements on widening access.

The number of Scottish students from areas of multiple deprivation grew by 12 per cent at Strathclyde in 2015-16, and such students now account for a quarter of enrolments at the institution.

Judges were impressed by the university's approach to improving conversion rates in applications from "difficult-to-reach demographic groups".

The institution's "systematic approach to gathering and analysing data as well as its introduction of a bespoke system has led to significant and sustained growth in student numbers from its chosen target areas in Scotland", they said.





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OUTSTANDING STUDENT SERVICES TEAM

NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

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The winner of this year's Outstanding Student Services Team category established an innovative and collaborative approach to supporting student mental well-being.

Senior managers at Nottingham Trent University realised that they needed to make it easier for their students to access mental health support from the institution itself and from the NHS.

In response, they developed partnerships in collaboration with the students' union that have allowed students to benefit from internal and external expertise on well-being.

For example, a streamlined online referral route for students requiring advice and support has been developed, which offers a prompt response from NTU well-being practitioners and access to online services provided by SilverCloud, the NHS' online space for personalised programmes to help people experiencing a wide range of mental and behavioural problems.

Satisfaction with the services is high among students: 86 per cent of users gave a positive rating for the application process in January 2017, while 85 per cent were satisfied with the service's response to their issues.

"The team at Nottingham Trent has responded to a challenging service in a strategic way, and we were impressed at the holistic approach adopted," the judges commented. "Standout features include innovative use of IT, integration of residential services and excellent collaboration with external agencies. A well-deserved award."



INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY OF THE YEAR

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

A new science and creativity incubator bringing together academia and industry in the UK and China placed the University of Nottingham ahead of its competitors in this category.

The institution developed a “creative hub” linking government, universities and businesses in the two countries to ensure that cutting-edge ideas could be applied to new products and services and subsequently reach the market. It was begun in response to new policies in China focusing on sustainable growth in key subsectors of the creative economy and received about £12 million of investment from the Ningbo government. It focused on two of China’s priority sectors: screen industries and museums.

The hub led to a number of new programmes, including masterclasses aimed at upskilling museum staff and a screen industries film festival, which will see UK students visit China and compete with Asian and European peers to produce films telling the story of the city of Meishan to the Western world.

Meanwhile, a collaboration between the University of Nottingham, Nottingham City Council and the Palaeozoological Museum of China will result in a new exhibition in Nottingham of previously unseen feathered dinosaur fossils from China.

Overall, the incubator has resulted in institutional partnerships being initiated or cemented between a range of organisations including the Shanghai Museum; the National Portrait Gallery; the Victoria and Albert Museum; Ningbo TV; Zhejiang University; Royal Holloway, University of London; Nottingham Trent University; and the Ningbo Museum.

Judges said that Nottingham stood out in this category because it “built on a long-standing, effective China strategy to bring in new innovative partnerships with creative industries, businesses, museums and national institutions”.

ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT AWARD

CITY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

The success of the professional mentoring scheme at City, University of London, wins this year's Alumni Engagement Award for the institution.

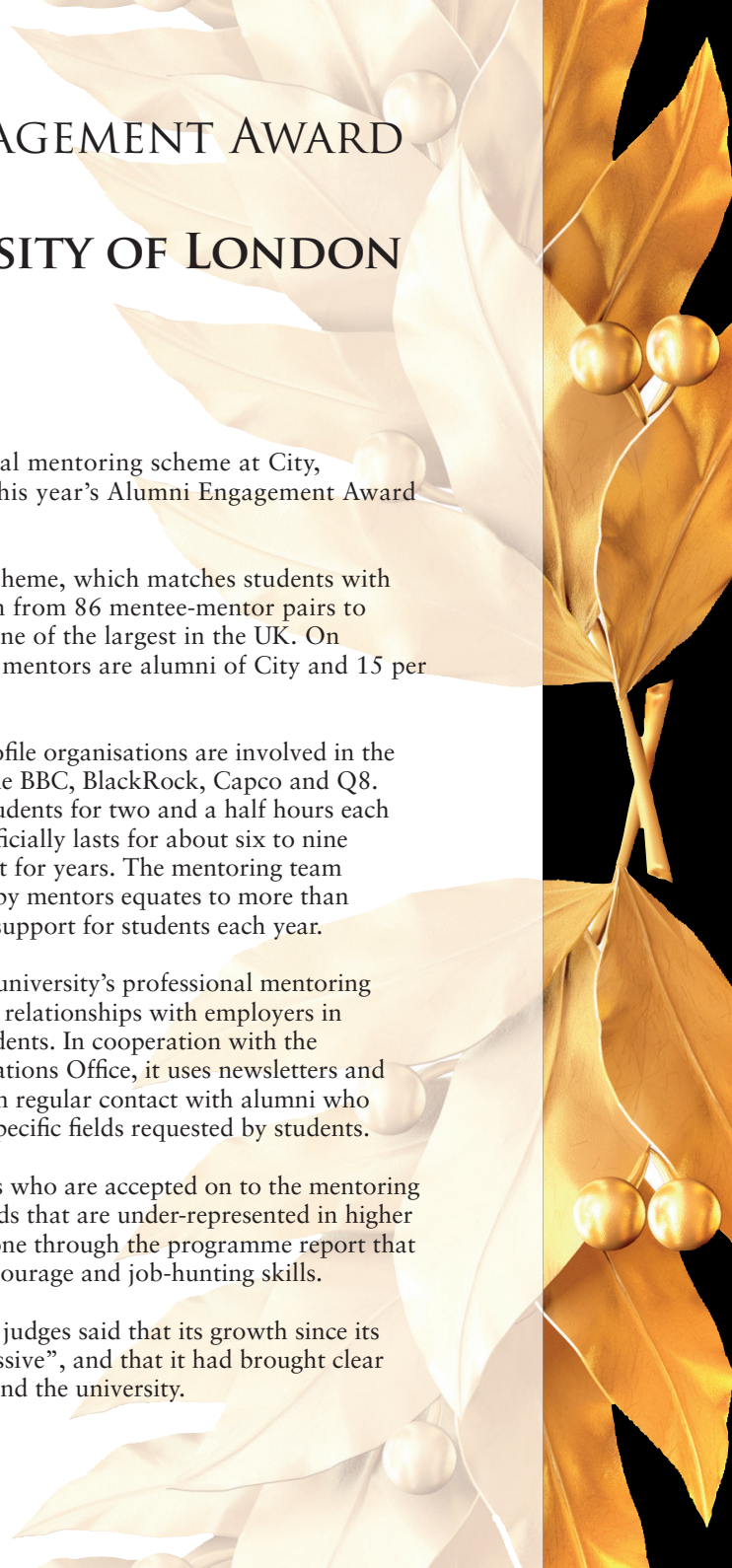
Over the past five years the scheme, which matches students with experts in industry, has grown from 86 mentee-mentor pairs to almost 400 and has become one of the largest in the UK. On average, more than a third of mentors are alumni of City and 15 per cent are current staff.

Mentors from several high-profile organisations are involved in the scheme, including the NHS, the BBC, BlackRock, Capco and Q8. Mentors usually work with students for two and a half hours each month and the relationship officially lasts for about six to nine months, but some go on to last for years. The mentoring team estimates that the time put in by mentors equates to more than £150,000 worth of pro bono support for students each year.

The programme is run by the university's professional mentoring team, which works to develop relationships with employers in the industries that interest students. In cooperation with the Development and Alumni Relations Office, it uses newsletters and targeted messaging to maintain regular contact with alumni who could offer mentoring in the specific fields requested by students.

Almost 60 per cent of students who are accepted on to the mentoring scheme come from backgrounds that are under-represented in higher education. Those who have gone through the programme report that it improved their confidence, courage and job-hunting skills.

In recognising the scheme, the judges said that its growth since its introduction had been "impressive", and that it had brought clear benefits to students, mentors and the university.





OUTSTANDING EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY

A drive to improve the quality of leadership and collaboration in the tourism sector secured the Outstanding Employer Engagement Initiative title for Edinburgh Napier University.

The Destination Leadership Programme, delivered in partnership with Scottish Enterprise, is specifically designed to “enhance the visitor experience and secure competitive advantage” for Scottish tourism. The programme runs from October to April, outside the main tourism season, and consists of four one-day workshops, three residential weekends and an assessed leadership project.

Participants have already come from tour operators, visitor attractions, festivals, events and accommodation providers. Tourism academics and professionals from across the globe have taken part as guest speakers, while partners such as Edinburgh Castle, the Royal Yacht *Britannia* and the National Museum of Scotland have shared their expertise or premises. The programme has also included “learning journeys” to destinations such as Amsterdam, Copenhagen and Manchester.

A cohort of more than 60 alumni now remain in touch through social media and frequent events. Spin-off projects include a Women in Tourism network, research into whether Edinburgh is ready to capitalise on the Chinese market and a joint marketing campaign between Edinburgh and Glasgow.

A shortened version of the programme has already been delivered in Singapore to the Association of Singapore Attractions.

The judges described the programme as “an exemplar of a university working effectively to transform a key sector in the economy through collaboration with employers”, adding that “the response of the industry itself has been extremely positive”.



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