

# Annual Review 2024



# Contents

3	Chancellor's introduction
4	Welcome from the Vice Chancellor
6	Our successes
9	Working locally and globally
15	Chester Festival of Ideas
19	Research and Knowledge Exchange
28	Catalysing positive socioeconomic change
31	Meet our graduates
34	About us
35	Final word from President of University Council





“

*“It is so important to keep looking up and out; to play a part in shaping the world for which we are preparing our graduates.”*



## Chancellor's introduction

As large communities in themselves and with so many external pressures to balance, it's so easy for universities to become inward focused. And yet it is so important to keep looking up and out; to play a part in shaping the world for which we are preparing our graduates. This year, nothing exemplified this better than Chester's very first Festival of Ideas, led by the University with the support of our wonderful local stakeholders. I was delighted to contribute to a programme of more than eighty free, public events across the City, garnering some incredibly positive and encouraging feedback from attendees. Look out for the 2025 Festival of Ideas from 3rd to 6th July!

The Festival was an opportunity to share with the public some of the fascinating research being undertaken by our University staff and students and, in many cases, an opportunity for the public to input to and shape that research to ensure its relevance to, and representation of, our local communities. These connections are an enlivening reminder that – while we are primarily here to educate – we are also here to engage, entertain, inspire and consider our contributions to the future.

As always, this year's *Annual Review* showcases the best of the University of Chester community and you will see how the themes of connection, and of shaping the future, are evident throughout our institutional and individual achievements. It is an exciting time to be part of the University of Chester.

*Gyles Brandreth, Chancellor of the University of Chester*



## Welcome from the Vice-Chancellor

**I'm delighted to welcome you to the University of Chester's look back at the 2023/24 academic year.**

As ever, our commitment to our diverse student population drives everything we do. This year, we have delivered step changes in the student experience at Chester, and in the outcomes achieved by our graduates once they leave us, which have resulted in national recognition through awards and league tables (p.6). The wider benefits of these efforts are quantifiable: an independent report this year calculated that the University contributes a positive economic impact of 5.5 times its expenditure.

With this year's *Review* we've taken the opportunity to introduce you in more detail to some of our achievements and the individuals driving them – if you're new to the University of Chester, I hope you'll leave with a better sense of who we are and what we're trying to achieve. I invite you to explore, particularly: the value of our local and global activities (p.9); the measurable impacts we have had in terms of social value and economic growth (p.28); and, the recognition we have received for our research and knowledge exchange activities (p.19). It is through these efforts that we shape and enhance our own reputation, help our students and graduates to establish theirs, and contribute to that of our wonderful city.

Our work as a civic partner is reputationally defining. In partnership with Cheshire West and Chester Council and through their One City Plan, we continue to create mutually beneficial employment opportunities, seek solutions to the environmental and social challenges we all face, and support our local businesses. Of course, a particular highlight of our shared





*"Our work as a civic partner is reputationally defining. In partnership... we continue to create mutually beneficial employment opportunities, seek solutions to the environmental and social challenges we all face, and support our local businesses."*

endeavours over the past year has been the Chester Festival of Ideas (p.15). My thanks go, not only to the staff and students who worked so hard to make this high-profile event a success, but also to the members of the public who attended the Festival with open minds and engaging questions, and to our local stakeholders for their support and for the events they contributed, which included a look at archaeological treasures found right beneath the presenter's feet, accessible guided sustainability walks and, an exploration of diversity and culture in the Roman army.

Our achievements are even more celebrated considering the backdrop of what continues to be a challenging higher education sector, not just for us as an institution, but for our students, too: compared to 2020, students are now much more likely to be working to pay for their studies, and therefore to prioritise educational excellence and value for money as core concerns. This, combined with the fact that all universities have had to manage a huge erosion in the real value of student fees, means that we have had to be adaptive, innovative and focused in our efforts.

I hope this year's Review helps you to get to know us better; there are contact details and QR codes to scan throughout the document if you want to find out more about who we are and what we do best. If nothing else, I hope that you join us at our second Chester Festival of Ideas in July 2025!

***Professor Eunice Simmons, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Chester***

# Our successes 2023



## September

Publication of the third Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) again highlighted that the University outperforms its peers when it comes to the work we do with businesses, charities and our communities. The new findings ranked us in the top 20% among our peers for our strengths in sharing research, education and expertise for the benefit of the wider economy and society. This month we also rose 21 places in the national Guardian University Guide 2024, with outstanding achievements in several areas, including teaching quality, support for assessment and graduate employability. We were also ranked in the top ten nationally for our education offers in: Hospitality, Event Management and Tourism; Theology and Religious Studies; and, Social Work.

## October

We rose 24 places in the HEPI Social Mobility Index 2023, placing us in the top third nationally for the impact in attracting and supporting undergraduates from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Crucially, the Index considers the full journey of these students, from the point they enter higher education through to the outcomes they go on to achieve, and is testament to our commitment to this work. In another exciting development for our ongoing work to widen access to higher education, this month also saw the Government announce that the University's growing Chester Medical School would receive funding for 50 new graduate entry level medical students – an endorsement of our close relationships with our clinical practice partners and their confidence in the University of Chester to deliver a graduate entry programme that widens participation in the medical profession and responds to future workforce needs.



## November

At this month's graduation ceremony we recognised six outstanding individuals, who received honorary degrees from the institution. These included renowned comedian and television presenter, Adam Hills, who was celebrated for his contributions to comedy and disability advocacy. His involvement with the Warrington Wolves Physical Disability Rugby League Team earned him a Doctor of Letters. Susie Dent, the lexicographer and presenter, famous for her appearances on the show *Countdown* and her love of language, received a Doctor of Letters. Her award was presented by the University's Chancellor and her sometime 'dictionary corner' colleague, Gyles Brandreth.

## December

This month we were honoured to received two awards from the Purpose Coalition, a cross-party organisation committed to breaking down barriers to opportunity in the UK. Our Vice-Chancellor was named as the joint winner of the University Leader of the Year award for her pivotal role in widening participation and breaking down barriers to education. Professor Simmons is the Chair of the Board of Trustees of TASO (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education), an independent charity which has the vision to eliminate equality gaps in higher education. Also celebrated was our Digital on Tour project (DoT) – a mobile facility that has taken digital technologies and skills training out into primary and secondary schools – which was recognised in the Closing the Digital Divide category. To date DoT has worked with nearly 10,000 learners, including schoolchildren, University students and local businesses, to showcase digital technologies such as remote sensors and 3D scanning, and to upskill individuals on how to apply these technologies in a wide range of settings.

# Our successes 2024



## April

Our Chester Business School (CBS) won Business School of the Year at the Educate North Awards. The Awards bring together the best of the North's higher education, further education and sixth form institutions, to celebrate world-class achievements, developments, and success. CBS was recognised for its work building networks and supporting businesses to innovate and thrive locally: not only do these connections secure opportunities for our students to gain real-world knowledge and skills, but CBS's activity also contributes to local (and national) economic growth.

## May

This month saw two further prestigious awards for our academic faculties. The Faculty of Health, Medicine and Society won the Teaching Innovation of the Year Award at the Student Nursing Times Awards for their 'Your First of Everything' podcast, which invites healthcare professionals to share first experiences from their clinical practice or from higher education. The focus is on authentic stories that explore pivotal moments in people's careers. Student volunteers from our School of Law and Social Justice won a prestigious national award at the House of Lords in recognition of their work with women experiencing domestic abuse. The students were named winners of the 2024 LawWorks and Attorney General's Student Pro Bono Award for Best New Pro Bono Activity.

## July

We didn't end the academic year quietly – this month was our first ever Chester Festival of Ideas. This programme of free public events was a huge celebration of our staff, students and external stakeholders, all of whom delivered challenging and engaging events. See page 15 for more details!

# Working locally and globally

**Universities never operate within a vacuum; we are part of an international educational community, while also being ‘anchor’ institutions in our localities and regions.**

Our Citizen Student Strategy foregrounds civic engagement and a long-term commitment to placemaking for the benefit of local communities and employers. We are the only University in Cheshire and Warrington, and have worked hard to develop and maintain thriving and productive partnerships with key stakeholders. Based in Chester, we have invested in University Centres in Warrington, Reaseheath and Birkenhead, where we have listened to and co-created our educational offer with local authorities, the NHS and major employers. We are central to Cheshire West and Chester’s One City Plan and are committed to Chester’s Business Improvement District (BID). These relationships are so important in shaping the positive contribution we make to our local areas and communities, but also in shaping how our city and university are viewed internationally.

## A local partner

We think Chester is a fantastic city, and it seems that our students agree: from surveying our students, we know that 87% of our UK undergraduate students would like to stay in the local area (i.e., within a 30-mile radius of where they studied) after completion of their studies. This is great news for local employers that are facing recruitment challenges and makes it even more important for us to develop and maintain strong relationships with those employers, and with other local stakeholders and place makers.





## Employers and the workforce

We have a responsibility to ensure that the skills and opportunities available to our student community not only reflect the workplaces they are to enter, but also the challenges facing our local and global communities, and we can't do this without our key partners.

We were incredibly grateful this year for the support of local employers who sponsored Chester Business School's Master of Business Administration (MBA) Awards, where we recognised the academic, personal and business achievements of our postgraduate MBA students. The event was not just about looking back, it was an excellent business networking opportunity and resulted in businesses signing up to mentor MBA students.

Connections with local employers are crucial to every academic discipline: for example, this year we worked with Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet, to showcase a selection of our Fashion Design student's collections in a pop-up showroom. We also held an Unlock Your Future Student Social Capital Conference, which was open to all students and featured a range of networking opportunities and presentations from speakers, including Victoria Carr, a Headteacher, Army Reserve Officer and Author. Students were invited to share their 'social capital' stories, which were then judged by Kathy Szeputi, Head of Brand and Communications at HM3 Legal.

In February 2024, our Centre for Academic Innovation and Development and our Careers and Employability Service led roundtable consultations with regional employers and business leaders. We explored their workforce needs and how we could work even more closely with them to support students to develop sought-after skills during their studies. This has resulted in the establishment of employer-advisory boards across all subjects to deepen employer involvement with our curricula and plans for a new competency-based Future Skills Curriculum, which privileges the



“

*“We are proud to sponsor this important evening, celebrating student achievements in the heart of Chester's business community. Continuous learning and development are at the heart of our firm's success and we celebrate the MBA programme at the University of Chester as it nurtures our region's next-generation business leaders.”*

**Claire Brook**  
*Employment Partner  
at lead sponsor,  
Aaron & Partners.*

application of knowledge in real-world contexts and to real-world issues. From live briefs where employers set students real-world challenges to tackle in groups, to employers as work-based mentors or even assessing student work, our sense of place in our community is strengthened by the diverse and effective ways we work with employers.

## Developing and celebrating our places

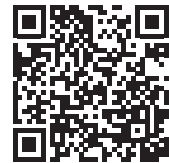
Our local partnerships go beyond skills and employment opportunities for our students; we are committed to making our local area the best it can be. This year, we celebrated our City's unique history, while exploring what its future could and should look like, in partnership with some of our area's (and the UK's) most innovative organisations.

As part of the Chester Rows High Street Heritage Action Zone programme, which is funded by Historic England and led by Cheshire West and Chester Council with partners, experts at the University developed a set of five short films unravelling the mysteries and celebrating 800 years of the Rows – the galleried upper-level streets in Chester. The films premiered during the Chester Heritage Festival over summer and can be viewed by scanning the QR code on the right.

**Want to find out  
how you or your  
business could work  
with our students or  
graduates?**



**Scan here**



**Watch the films**



A collection of historical artifacts from the 19th century, including a lantern, a hat, a book, a map, and a small box, displayed on a wooden surface. The artifacts are arranged on a wooden table or shelf. On the left is a large, ornate lantern with a glass chimney and a metal frame. Next to it is a small, dark, rectangular box. In the center is a large, dark, round hat. To the right of the hat is a small, light-colored box with a label that reads "EMERGENCY GUIDE". Below the hat is a map or a small book with illustrations of a landscape and a building. On the far right is a small, dark, rectangular box. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.



**The academic year ended with a huge first for us – Chester Festival of Ideas. See page 15 for all the details!**



## Our international community

While we are an institution very much of and for our local place, every year we also welcome to Chester students from across the world and our student population is now c.40% international students from more than 115 countries.

The International Student Barometer (ISB) Survey – an annual global survey completed by 155 universities in 25 countries, including 35 UK universities – confirmed that our international students' satisfaction rating is above the UK average, and since arriving in Chester they have achieved some great successes. This diversity is something of which we are very proud, and which has provided cultural enrichment and opportunities both locally and globally, and for both our students and the external stakeholders with whom we work.

## Global opportunities for students

Our international students bring fresh perspectives and enrich our university community. Psychology student, Opeyemi Da-Silva, from Nigeria, won a national award from SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) in recognition of resources she developed for international students, to aid them settling into UK university life, both socially and academically.

Global connections are also vital for broadening the horizons of our UK students. Geography student, Isabella, had the opportunity to study abroad in at Montana State University in the USA. In addition to an amazing educational and cultural experience, Isabella also identified how important the experience was for future employment skills, whether that be locally or internationally:

“

*“I’ve had the opportunity to work on my independence, confidence, and time management skills, and have had to become very self-reliant while living so far away from my support network... Knowing that I can experiment with new ideas and the realisation that there is more out there than just in my local area has helped me immensely when thinking about the future.”*

● **Isabella**  
Geography student.

**Scan here to find out  
more about Study  
Abroad options:**



**Scan here**

## Supporting the global academic community

Our responsibilities to the communities of which we are part extend internationally. In addition to the students who are able to join us from across the world, we work with The Council for At-Risk Academics (CARA), which provides urgently needed help to academics in immediate danger, those forced into exile, and many who choose to work on in their home countries despite serious risks. CARA reports that there has been 400% increase in at-risk academics seeking temporary refuge in the UK over the past three years – a reflection of the escalation of conflicts around the world.

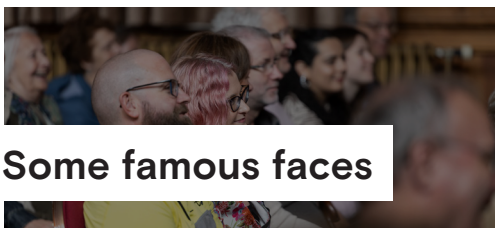
This year we hosted the launch of CARA's fundraising campaign, and the national Times Higher Education Awards concluded with a powerful speech from our PhD student, Allam Harfoush, who spoke about the impact that CARA has had; enabling him to continue his academic ambitions by joining the University of Chester from Syria.



# Chester Festival of Ideas

**Over four days in July we were incredibly proud to celebrate the first-ever Chester Festival of Ideas – a programme of free public events designed to engage and inspire our University and wider communities.**

We developed this University-led, city-wide Festival, with our local stakeholders, including Cheshire West and Chester Council, Storyhouse, Chester Cathedral and Grosvenor Museum, developing and delivering a diverse programme of more than eighty events. We established a hub at Chester Town Hall and encouraged event leaders to use venues across the City, including our City's fascinating outdoor spaces, and engaged high-profile speakers for each day, who delivered thought-provoking sessions to packed audiences.



**| Some famous faces**

**FESTIVAL**  
*of ideas*



## **Professor David Olusoga History and the History Wars**

History is now front-page news, contested as never before: statues have fallen, and the reputations of great men called into question. With an audience of 300, Professor Olusoga examined the causes of the 'history wars' and asked where they might lead us, followed by a lively Q&A session with the audience.

David Olusoga is a British-Nigerian historian, author, presenter and BAFTA winning film maker, who was awarded an OBE in 2019 for services to history and community integration.



## **Baroness Floella Benjamin** **Facing Adversity with a Smile**

Floella entertained and challenged our audience with her story, including: her childhood journey to England as a ten-year-old girl; her transition from trainee bank clerk to actress; and, how she overcame many adversities and obstacles by having a positive attitude and learning to face them with a smile. Floella encouraged all of us to focus on the important fact that ‘childhood lasts a lifetime’, and how we might change the world for children and young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Floella Benjamin is an actress, presenter, broadcaster, writer, campaigner, parliamentarian and honorary of the University of Chester.



## **Gyles Brandreth** **The Ideas of Happiness and how to achieve it**

It was the American Declaration of Independence that introduced the idea of “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” as unalienable rights – 4th July 1776 is the date when the modern idea of a right to happiness was born. Using this as the starting point for his event, Gyles explored the idea of happiness as it has developed across the centuries, introducing the audience to his 7 Secrets of Happiness.

Gyles Brandreth is a writer, broadcaster, actor, former MP and Lord Commissioner of the Treasury, and also our Chancellor!



## **Carole Cadwalladr** **AI and Democracy**

In 2018, Pulitzer-nominated journalist Carole Cadwalladr exposed the Cambridge Analytica data scandal. During this in-conversation event, held at local arts centre, Storyhouse, Carole discussed what impact the next wave of tech disruption – generative AI – could have on democracies across the world.

Carole Cadwalladr is a multi-award-winning British journalist, currently writing for the Guardian and The Observer.



## A platform for local ideas

In addition to our wonderful high-profile event leaders, University staff and students, and external organisations and individuals, were encouraged to submit event ideas for the Festival.

We were so pleased to receive creative suggestions from local schools, Brio Leisure, Chester Cathedral, Company Carpi, among others. The result was an amazing range of event topics, which included guided walks, dance performance, creative workshops and many more, exploring ideas relating to many aspects of our society, history and future:

- Reconstructing Roman Chester
- We look but do we really see? Exploring and understanding local landscapes
- Female hormones and health
- How to speak chimpanzee
- Have you got what it takes to be an elite athlete?
- Creating community artwork
- Future Chester – the smart creative city



## What next for the Festival?

The Festival recorded more than 2,500 attendances over the four days and, following excellent feedback from attendees (97% of respondents said they would recommend the Festival to others), a second Festival is planned for 2025.

We view the Festival as the pinnacle of our public engagement calendar; a celebration of our work, our stakeholders and our wonderful city. Going forwards, we will continue to: develop the network of local stakeholders that have so much to contribute to the Festival of Ideas; use the Festival as a platform to celebrate the world-class research and knowledge exchange activities of our academics; and, stimulate constructive discussion that enhances the reputation of our University and city.

**We'd love to see you at the next Festival – please scan the QR code on the right to go to the website, where you can view the events programme and reserve your FREE ticket.**



**Scan here**

# Research and Knowledge Exchange



## Did you know?

**Over half of our research is** rated as either **world-leading or internationally excellent** by the national Research Excellence Framework (2021), **and we consistently outperform our peers** in the Knowledge Exchange Framework, which measures the activities universities undertake with businesses, communities and other key stakeholders.

Our research and knowledge exchange work is centred around our three Research and Knowledge Exchange Institutes (RKEIs), which consolidate work around three priority areas:

- Sustainability and Environment
- Health and Wellbeing
- Culture and Society

The RKEIs share the same overarching aims, which are to bring together researchers (both staff and students) to foster interdisciplinary working. By strengthening existing relationships and building new collaborations, the RKEIs are also well-placed to work closely with external partners and communities. All three RKEIs run a range of public events throughout the year, including public lecture series and 'sandpit'-style networking days. We welcome input from external stakeholders and communities, and look forward to collaborating on future projects.



## Research and Knowledge Exchange



### Sustainability and Environment

Building partnerships and sharing expertise that can address the nature and climate emergencies are core elements of our role as a university.

This year, we've contributed internationally significant work that helps us to better understand – and protect – our natural environment, and the changes and challenges that it faces.

### Sustainability partnerships

Over the past year our Sustainability and Environment RKEI has worked closely with our students and local partners to find new ways to approach the challenges we all face. An event with Chester Sustainability Forum – a network of sustainability-focused third sector and community organisations from across Cheshire (including Cheshire Wildlife Trust, the Centre for Energy Equality and Forest City Projects) – invited University staff to pitch their research and expertise, as a means of identifying opportunities for collaborative research and knowledge exchange.

A further opportunity for ideas sharing was facilitated by our hosting a conference in collaboration with UK for Good and a range of expert speakers, focused on the theme of 'survive or thrive – sustainable business as a force for good'. Businesses, other organisations, staff and students were all invited to join the discussions and activities aimed at identifying practical ways in which organisations can enhance their positive environmental and societal impacts. Feedback from the 60+ attendees was really positive, and the event has led to further networking and sharing of best practice.

---

## Learning from nature

In last year's Review we celebrated a prestigious funding grant that had been awarded to the BATMAN project, which is advancing the understanding of small-bodied bats' responses to human-induced environmental changes. Since the funding award, Dr Christina Stanley, Professor Tessa Smith and PhD student Lucy Morison have been working closely with the Vincent Wildlife Trust and Professor Yu Shi at the University of Leeds, collecting data from ten bat roosts in North Wales. Bats are vital to the functioning of many ecosystems by controlling insect populations, pollinating plants and dispersing seeds and the combined methods used in this study will enable a giant leap forward in monitoring vulnerable species worldwide.

Also supported by a research grant, this time from Innovate UK, Professor Julieanna Powell-Turner and Melissa Spiers are working with the University of Bristol and Flox a comprehensive analysis of a real higher-welfare broiler chicken system in the UK. Research in this field is vital to the UK poultry industry as we shift towards greater welfare and sustainability standards, to ensure both occur in parallel rather than as competing objectives. Our researchers have also considered the impact of the urban environment on red squirrels' problem-solving, learning and memory. Dr Pizza Ka Yee Chow has worked in partnership with Hokkaido University in Japan, highlighting how important the work is: "[the] research is needed as urban areas expand, leading to more species living in these environments, to discover more about how its wildlife thrives or declines, and to inform city management of green space and land use such as creating larger 'buffer' zones for wildlife to decrease disturbance."

It is not only our academic staff that is involved in significant efforts to understand and support our natural world. This year, Psychology with Animal Behaviour student, Lauren Kent-Walton, won the esteemed Association for the Study of Animal Behaviour (ASAB) Undergraduate Recognition Award for her dissertation on dolphin behaviour. Lauren observed captive bottlenose dolphins for 30 hours through online webcams, examining behaviours demonstrated in differently designed enclosures.

## Research and Knowledge Exchange



### Health and Wellbeing

An interdisciplinary approach to the complexities of health and wellbeing is essential, including co-working with our publics and communities.

---

This year we've developed important research and knowledge exchange activities to provide targeted support for specific communities and to better prepare the professionals who care for those communities.

## **Tackling health inequalities**

The UK Health Security Agency awarded us two funding grants this year, to support better planning for future health challenges. Particularly, learning from the Covid-19 pandemic, the projects – led by Professor Paul Kingston – will consider public attitudes towards risk, resilience, and preparedness, and consider the unintended consequences of decisions on inclusion health groups.

Also committed to understanding and addressing health inequalities, the nuTritional heAlth aNd aGeing in older ethnic miNoritiEs – or TANGERINE – project is developing new resources to help people from ethnic minority communities eat a healthier diet in older age. Funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and undertaken in partnership with Bournemouth and Loughborough Universities, the project – led by Professor Basma Ellahi at Chester – recognises the health conditions that can be more prevalent in certain minority ethnic groups and is focused on working with those communities to develop a culturally tailored toolkit.

## **Better-prepared professionals**

In addition to groundbreaking research, our innovative knowledge exchange work ensures that practitioners already in the workplace are able to keep their skills and knowledge up to date. This year the Attachment Trauma Mental Health (ATMH) Partnership team in our School of Education worked with six local authorities to develop new attachment-aware and trauma-informed learning resources for schools. A new Level 7 module was developed and delivered for Cheshire West, to train 'trauma-informed leads' who will act as trailblazers for the authority, addressing the impact of attachment, adversity, trauma and mental health difficulties on children, young people and adults across all settings.

## Research and Knowledge Exchange



### Culture and Society

Understanding our past and present to inform the way we shape our future is a vital part of the work universities can contribute to their local and global communities.



---

## Award-winning research

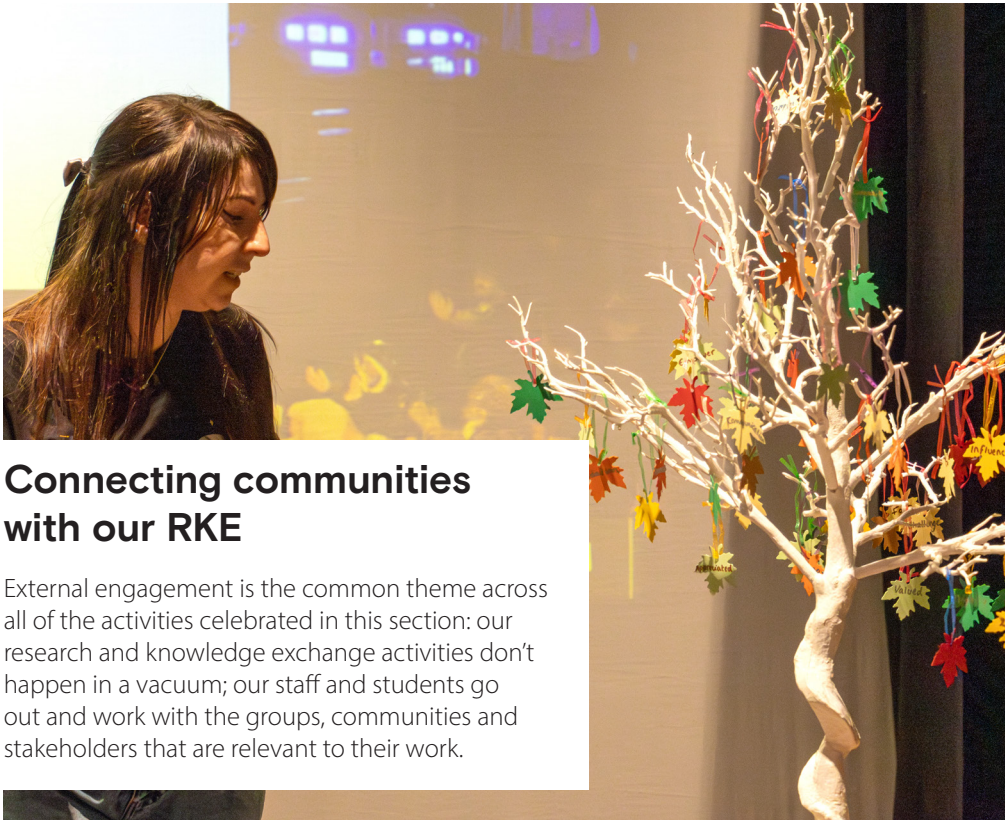
This year Associate Professor Andrea (Andy) Todd from our School of Law and Social Justice won a prestigious award for the national impact of her research. The Universities Association for Lifelong Learning recognised the contribution of Andy's research into the experiences of students with parental responsibility to the Lifelong Learning agenda across the sector. Over the past three years Andy has undertaken local and national research projects with undergraduate student-parents with the aim of understanding what student-parents need from their institution to help them succeed.

Also this year, Dr Gill Buck, Associate Professor of Social Work, was named one of the most promising research leaders in the UK and awarded a share of £104m allocated by UKRI to researchers who are tackling global issues. Gill's research focuses on the criminal justice system and her team will undertake the first major study of participatory criminal justice across the UK and Ireland; this is where people draw on experiences of criminalisation to re-evaluate and co-deliver justice systems. This is urgent work, given that 11.5 million people are now imprisoned globally, and that reoffending rates are high in most Western countries (in the UK alone, reoffending costs around £18bn annually).

## Publishing success

Other University staff members who celebrated this year included those who published new books: covering themes from feminism and religion through to poverty and austerity, the works of Dr Dawn Llewellyn, Associate Professor in Religion and Gender; Morven McEachern, Professor of Sustainability and Marketing Ethics, and Dr Ben Fulford, Deputy Head, Humanities, Cultures and Environment, all push disciplinary boundaries and are international in both their reach and outlook.

## Research and Knowledge Exchange



### Connecting communities with our RKE

External engagement is the common theme across all of the activities celebrated in this section: our research and knowledge exchange activities don't happen in a vacuum; our staff and students go out and work with the groups, communities and stakeholders that are relevant to their work.

We are incredibly proud of the public, business and academic engagement our staff and students carry out, and over the past year we've tried to make sure they have opportunities to create and sustain these vital networks. We have implemented a new software solution that provides our external stakeholders and communities with a gateway to explore the profiles of our staff members.

This makes it easier to: learn about our research, knowledge exchange and public engagement specialisms; identify opportunities to collaborate with our staff; and, understand more about our teaching and learning offer. **Scan the QR code on the right to search.**

We also share research and knowledge exchange through our University of Chester Press, which aims to provide authors with a cost-effective means of publishing their work. Through its publications the Press shares excellent original research, professional practice and creative work associated with the University, and then prioritises those with a significant relationship to Cheshire and the wider region. This year, publications included: an anthology of shortlisted entries from the 2022 Cheshire Prize for Literature competition; a collection of Bible talks primarily hosted by Chester Cathedral; the key identification guide for Britain and Ireland's myxomycetes; and, the first biography of Janet Vaughan, the pioneering medical scientist and Principal of Somerville College, Oxford. **Scan the QR code on the right to find out more.**

Our RKEIs hold a range of public lectures throughout the year to showcase and invite discussion around their work – **scan the QR code on the right to browse events!** We also create opportunities for our students to share their original work, including our Showcase of Undergraduate Research Exchange (SURE), which was an opportunity for undergraduate students to share their research with others. Similarly, our postgraduate researchers showcased their research at the Festival of Ideas (which is celebrated on page 15).



Profiles



UoC Press















Events

# Catalysing positive socioeconomic change

Universities play significant roles within their local (and wider) societies and economies. Our actions as a large employer, as a local placemaking organisation and as an educator of the citizens and workforce of the future can all have wide-reaching impacts on our students, staff and communities. Over the last year we've focused on these impacts, ensuring we understand what they are and what our future ambitions should look like.

## Institutional impact

An independent impact assessment commissioned last year calculated that the University had generated economic value totalling £814m of Gross Value Added (GVA); this is equivalent to an impact of 5.5x our yearly expenditure.

		 <p>A highly significant employer with <b>1,573 staff</b></p>	 <p>Driving economic value with total <b>GVA created of £814m</b> 5.5x expenditure</p>
		 <p>Creating skills for the future with <b>14,652 enrolled students</b></p>	 <p>The University has generated <b>£138m</b> in annual income</p>
 <p>Staff salaries amount to <b>£63.7m</b> of local direct wages</p>	 <p>The supply chain involves <b>£53.3m</b> of operational expenditure</p>	 <p>The University has <b>invested £25m</b> in capital assets over the last 5 years</p>	 <p>Provides <b>£32.4m</b> in direct taxes back to the Exchequer</p>
 <p>Annual graduations of 4,800 providing organisations with <b>at least 1,300 new local recruits</b></p>	 <p>The University attracts almost <b>6,500 additional residents</b> supporting different economic sectors</p>	 <p>Generating UK exports and international links with <b>2,749 overseas students up 7.4%</b></p>	 <p>University students <b>add c2,000 people</b> to the workforce of the local area</p>

The assessment we undertook not only highlighted our impact, but also the breadth of our economic contribution: each year we employ more than 1,500 local people; we spend more than £10m with local businesses; and, our activities bring more than 14,000 students and visitors to Cheshire and Warrington from across the world.

Growth is not valuable unless it's also inclusive and beneficial to our communities. As a large employer, we seek to model best practice through our own activities, and increasingly we align our work with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, which provides a framework for sustainable and inclusive growth. We're proud to be moving up in the HEPI Social Mobility Index rankings, which assess the social distance travelled by socioeconomically disadvantaged graduates, and our public commitments to making access to and success in higher education more inclusive are published in our Access and Participation Plan.



“

*“Chester plays its role in making sure that young people from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds can get into the institution and then really successfully study and get their degree.”*

**Justine Greening,**  
*on the Purpose Coalition podcast.*



## The contributions of our staff and students

Over the past year our staff and students have worked with key external stakeholders on some important and impactful projects.

The Head of our School of Law and Social Justice, Associate Professor Ruth Sutton, was a member of a national taskforce focused on boosting social mobility in the legal sector. The resulting action plan – *Breaking Down Barriers to Law* – was the result of a collaborative project by the Purpose Coalition and a group of leading law firms and universities. Locally, colleagues in our School of Humanities and Social Sciences launched their *Local Voices Framework* at an event with representatives of public, voluntary and community frontline organisations. The work of Dr Holly White and Dr Kim Ross highlights the role that co-production can play in catalysing positive social change, meaning that research should be ‘with’, rather than ‘on’ people, and their Framework was developed as the result of a partnership with Cheshire West Voluntary Action.

For several years now, staff in Chester Business School have worked in partnership with our local authority, Cheshire West and Chester Council, to provide support and grant funding to innovative local businesses. Over 2023/24 the team worked with more than 150 local businesses, securing more than £250k in grant funding for 28 businesses. This work protected or created more than 200 jobs and enabled businesses to introduce 22 new products or services, and the team continue this work into 2024/25.



# Meet our graduates



**The teaching, research and knowledge exchange opportunities that our students access while they're with us are designed to set them up for whatever they want to do next. In this section, meet some of our graduates and find out what some of those who study with us have achieved. If you're a graduate and would like to share your story with us, please scan this QR code and get in touch!**

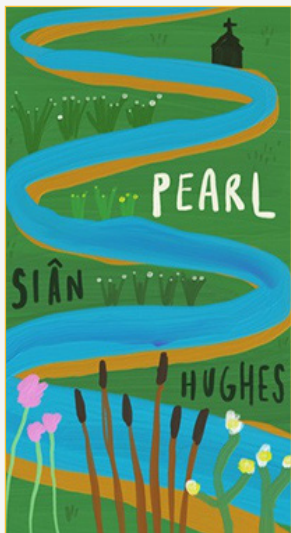


**Scan here**

Our graduates have gone on to: start their own businesses; compete in the Paralympics; secure prestigious positions in some of the UK's most prominent organisations; coach and mentor others; and, much more. It is testament to the holistic and varied experiences our students can access while they are with us, that our graduates display both focus and adaptability in these roles. In part, this is due to our wonderful staff and the businesses, alumni and others who work with us, coming into the University to offer mentoring, guest lectures and opportunities for our students – thank you.



## Meet our graduates



### **Siân Hughes** **Longlisted for The Booker Prize 2023**

Alumna Siân Hughes studied for her PhD in Creative Writing with us, using her first novel – *Pearl* – as her creative text. Siân credits the team at the University for having “supported my writing with such insight that when the book was accepted for publication the publishers said, ‘This doesn’t need much work’”, and *Pearl* was subsequently longlisted for the Booker Prize. Siân’s novel was very much inspired by her childhood in Cheshire and The Booker Prize judges described her work as, “an exceptional debut novel. . . evoking the profundities of the haunting medieval poem, *Pearl*. The degree of difficulty in writing a book of this sort – at once quiet and hugely ambitious – is very high. It’s a book that will be passed from hand to hand for a long time to come.”



### **Lina Tejoprayitno and Daniel Barnes** **Dragon’s Den success**

Lina Tejoprayitno and Daniel Barnes met while studying for their Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) at the Chester Business School and founded Pop Specs in 2020, providing eyewear from £75 and making lenses for customers while they wait – in only 20 minutes. The company established its first site in the Trafford Centre and kiosks are now appearing in shopping centres across the UK. The duo was successful in securing a £75k investment on the hit BBC show, *Dragon’s Den*, with Dragon Peter Jones describing the team as a “breath of fresh air” – congratulations!

## Meet our graduates



### **Emma-Louise Simpson** **Prestigious scholarship**

Graduate, Emma-Louise Simpson, who studied for an LLB Law degree with our School of Law and Social Justice, was the recipient of a coveted scholarship at Grays Inn (one of the Inns of the Court) to study to be a barrister. Emma-Louise studied part-time, choosing to return to education as a mature student alongside working and bringing up her young son. During her studies Emma-Louise was able to contribute to academic research looking at the barriers faced by parents entering higher education, a project which has gone on to influence the Office for Students' approach to student-parents.



### **Lyndon Howson** **Conservationist of the Year**

Zoology graduate, Lyndon Howson, was named Conservationist of the Year – Fauna at the 2024 People of Nature Awards, organised by WeNaturalists. This accolade recognises his dedication to native species conservation, focusing on integrating youth governance to promote environmental stewardship and sustainable practices. The People of Nature Award is a global recognition, celebrating individuals whose outstanding commitment contribute to the protection and preservation of the environment and biodiversity on earth. Lyndon has spearheaded numerous conservation initiatives: in just 18 months his work on the Hedgehog Friendly Campus Project grew from a small volunteer base to a thriving community of over 170.

# About us

## Our University in 2023/24

**2,469 staff**

(1,600 FTE)

**14,215 students:**

8,345 undergraduates

5,870 postgraduates

Plus 2,000

students at our partner institutions

**120,716**

alumni

## Finance

Please scan the  
QR code to view  
our latest financial  
statement



## Our academic structure

### Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Chester School of Education

School for the Creative Industries

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

School of Law and Social Justice

### Faculty of Health, Medicine and Society

Chester Medical School

School of Nursing and Midwifery

School of Allied and Public Health

School of Society

### Faculty of Science, Business and Enterprise

Chester Business School

School of Natural Sciences

School of Computing and Engineering Sciences



## Final word from the President of University Council

There has been a real sense of purpose, pace and innovation about the University this year: we have been crystal clear about where we want to be, and more intentional about how we get there. This effort is evidenced by the many national and regional accolades and recognition we have received and, of course, by the incredible achievements of our students. My thanks go to everyone who has worked so hard to make all of this happen during challenging times for our sector and the country.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to all of our Governors for their commitment, input and expertise this year. This voluntary role carries huge responsibilities and is crucial to the success of universities. My colleagues bring to our Board experience from a wide range of backgrounds and sectors, including the Church of England, private industry, the NHS, and local government. There are tough decisions to be made in our sector and it's vital that we have diverse voices in the room to ensure we reach the best possible solutions.





Looking back at our very successful 2023/24 to write this reminds me that 2024/25 will be my last year as President of the University Council. There continue to be incredibly difficult challenges ahead for the entire education sector and these will likely remain for some time. However, my long career has taught me to believe in the enduring power of education as a transformational process that positively changes lives and communities. This year's Review has highlighted the reach and impact of this transformation, supporting such a wide variety of communities and individuals, locally, nationally and globally.

As ever, please do get in touch with us – come to an event, find out how you can work with our wonderful staff and students, and consider where a next step in higher education could take you!

***Dr Meredydd David OBE, DL, MPhil, FRAGS***





-  [Facebook.com/uocchester](https://www.facebook.com/uocchester)
-  [x.com/uocchester](https://www.x.com/uocchester)
-  [YouTube.com/uocchester](https://www.youtube.com/uocchester)
-  [Instagram.com/uocchester](https://www.instagram.com/uocchester)

Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ  
Tel: 01244 511000  
Email: [enquiries@chester.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@chester.ac.uk)  
[www.chester.ac.uk](http://www.chester.ac.uk)