

# HORIZON

Staffordshire University  
2024 ISSUE

## HONOURED TO MEET YOU

Introducing Staffordshire University's  
new Honorary Doctors

## MORE THAN A GAME

Celebrating 20 years of what's  
become the biggest university  
games department in the UK

## PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S ART

An insight into the world of  
interpreting drawings

# ARE YOU AN EMPLOYER LOOKING TO UPSKILL YOUR WORKFORCE?

We are experts in providing higher and degree apprenticeships for more than 200 businesses across a variety of industries.

Higher and degree apprenticeships are an effective way for your business to grow existing or recruit new talent to develop a motivated, skilled and qualified workforce.

What can we offer:

- Dedicated account manager to support you through the process including advertising, funding and eligibility
- Apprenticeship courses including management, health and digital services
- Marketing support to ensure that you can effectively market your training opportunities to existing staff and new recruits

**REGISTER YOUR INTEREST NOW**

---

✉ [apprenticeshiprecruitment@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:apprenticeshiprecruitment@staffs.ac.uk)

☎ 0800 169 2148

[www.staffs.ac.uk/apprenticeships](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/apprenticeships)

---

**POWERED BY**



# CONTENTS

<b>More than a game</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>An animated life</b>	<b>34</b>
Staffordshire University's games department celebrates its 20th anniversary		Daniel Waterman moved to Stoke-on-Trent to study animation at Staffordshire University and never left. He co-founded a business that has worked with the likes of The Prodigy, Santander, the NHS and ITV	
<b>If you go down to the woods today</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Research</b>	<b>37</b>
The University's Woodlands Forest School is opening up opportunities for people of all ages		The University's latest research news	
<b>Virtual reality training for future lifesavers</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Honoured to meet you</b>	<b>40</b>
The University's Centre for Health Innovation has transformed the way healthcare students are taught		The University's Development and Alumni Relations team has launched an Honorary Doctors' Society (Hon Doc Soc) to bring together members of an important community	
<b>Raise a cheer</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Meet our new Honorary Doctors</b>	<b>42</b>
As Staffordshire Scarlettes celebrate their 20th anniversary we find out how the University's cheerleading club has become an award-winner		Staffordshire University bestowed Honorary Degrees on 12 worthy individuals in 2023	
<b>Holding out for a hero</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>Award-winning students</b>	<b>50</b>
The Your Heroes community awards campaign, organised by Staffordshire University, reaches right into the heart of our communities		From superyacht design to film making, meet some of the Staffordshire University students who have won awards for their creativity	
<b>It's good to talk</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>Designing for the future</b>	<b>52</b>
TEDxStaffordshireUniversity will be back for 2024 after a successful first event in 2023		Showcasing work to industry professionals is invaluable for creative students, which is why Staffordshire University's Horizon Fund has helped them to do exactly that	
<b>The psychology of children's art</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>Raising funds, widening horizons</b>	<b>56</b>
Associate Professor Richard Jolley gives an insight into his work interpreting children's drawings		Staffordshire University's Horizon Fund can unlock life-changing opportunities for students	
<b>And the winners are...</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>News</b>	<b>58</b>
Meet the winners of the inaugural Staffordshire University Business Awards		The latest University news, including proposals for a new student village at the Stoke-on-Trent campus	
<b>A pipeline of entrepreneurs</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Three voices</b>	<b>61</b>
Find out more about the Peter Coates MSc in Entrepreneurship		Three successful alumni share their stories	
<b>A sporting chance</b>	<b>32</b>		
From studying for a part-time law degree to setting up an international sports agency that negotiates the sale of football clubs, read alumni Gary Mellor's success story			

FEATURE ARTICLES

**COVER FEATURE**



**42**

**MEET OUR NEW HONORARY DOCTORS**



**AWARD-WINNING STUDENTS**

**50**

**IT'S GOOD TO TALK**



**TEDx**  
Staffordshire University

**20**

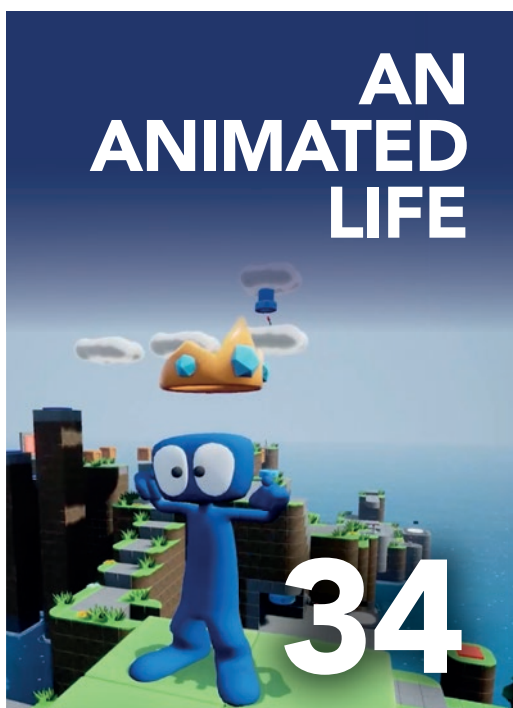
**MORE THAN A GAME**

**06**



**RABBIT RACERS**

W E L C O M E



Welcome to the 2024 issue of Staffordshire University's Horizon magazine.



It is a privilege to lead the University through what continues to be a time of incredible change. We live in challenging times but I firmly believe that Staffordshire University has the power to be a catalyst for change not just for its students and staff but also for the communities within which it is based.

Within the pages of this magazine you will see many examples of the difference the University is making to lives. The University's Your Heroes Awards, for example, reaches right into the heart of communities. A community awards campaign, it recognises and rewards unsung heroes such as children of courage, carers, community groups, charity champions, uniformed heroes and others who may perhaps not previously have seen a university as being a place for them.

The inaugural Staffordshire University Business Awards celebrated more than 135 stories of business success in the region, ranging from a not-for-profit that feeds families in need to an energy company with a £100 million annual turnover.

You can read about the Staffordshire University games department which celebrates its 20th anniversary, has become the largest games department in the UK and is ranked in the top ten.

You will find features about the Centre for Health Innovation at the Stafford campus which has changed the way health-related courses are taught and the Woodlands Forest School which makes the most of the nature reserve at the Stoke-on-Trent campus.

I hope you enjoy this issue of Horizon and find, within its pages, many ways to engage with your University.

**Professor Martin Jones**  
Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive  
Staffordshire University

# MORE THAN A GAME

As Staffordshire University's games department celebrates its 20th anniversary we look at how it has transformed into the biggest university games department in the UK and one of the top ranked in the world.



It began with a single Computer Games Design course in 2004 and a handful of games-mad students. Now two decades on, The Rookies digital art community has just ranked Staffordshire University as one of the world's top 10 places to study games design and development.

We have the largest games department in the UK and our graduates can be found at virtually every major games studio, including Codemasters, Sumo Digital and Playground Games. They've also been involved in smash hits like Grand Theft Auto V and Red Dead Redemption 2.

Professor Chris Headleand, Head of Games Development at Staffordshire University, says: "Games is the world's biggest entertainment industry – it dwarfs film, music and TV. We've got a fantastic track record of getting students into the industry."

One of the key factors has been introducing much more specialised

degrees, which have provided a talent pipeline for studios wanting industry-ready graduates. The courses fall into three main categories: you can design the games experience; focus on games technologies and programming; or specialise in games art so you can create the characters and worlds they inhabit.

"We also get students to work together in a studio. We mirror what happens in industry," says Professor Headleand.

That's how the professionally-run Bulldog Studios was born. Every year, 30 students are recruited for the 1UP summer placement scheme offered through the in-house studio. They get to build real games.

Two of their most recent creations – a class action robot combat game called MechHead and a logic-based puzzle game, MentalBlock – have been shortlisted for the 2023 TIGA Industry Awards. They are up against games from commercial studios.

Last year, the student game StaffsVerse also won a national award. It is now being developed as a real platform and will be launched shortly.

**"GAMES IS THE WORLD'S BIGGEST ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY – IT DWARFS FILM, MUSIC AND TV. WE'VE GOT A FANTASTIC TRACK RECORD OF GETTING STUDENTS INTO THE INDUSTRY."**



People will be able to join a metaverse version of the University to tour the campus and scout out the buildings where they will be studying. Over time, there could even be some lectures set in StaffsVerse.

## **"THERE ARE ALSO 'CO-LAB' MODULES WHICH GIVE HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS A CHANCE TO BUILD GAMES TOGETHER. THEY WORK IN TEAMS TO MAKE PLAYABLE PRODUCTS."**

Professor Headleand says: "It's a virtual campus where people can interact and engage. We think it's a really useful tool, especially in helping students transition to university."

There are also 'co-lab' modules which give hundreds of students a chance to build games together. They work in teams to make playable products.

Students get to pitch their games to industry professionals as well, who give them valuable feedback. Chris Fitzpatrick is one of the Staffordshire University alumni involved in judging student competitions. The Computer Games Programming graduate is now a Senior Programmer at Codemasters.

Staff are also fizzing with project ideas to take the department forward. One of the latest successes, Level of Detail, is a vodcast series available on YouTube.

Lecturers are filmed playing iconic

video games as they chat about some of the technical features. They also invite industry guests on the show to provide insights into a wide range of topics.

Mike Beardwood has seen the rapid growth in games education at Staffordshire University close up – both as a student and lecturer. He took an Integrated Masters in Computer Games Design and graduated in 2010. He is now Course Leader for the BSc in the same subject.

"When I was a student here, we had paper handouts and did things on CDs. The course has changed significantly," he recalls. "There were 40 students when I started and now there are around 200 to 300 just doing the one course."

Back when Staffordshire University launched Computer Games Design – one of the UK's first fully fledged games degrees - newfangled consoles included PlayStation 2 and Xbox.

"Games are now getting so much more complex and more powerful. The industry is moving towards new technology all the time, with real-time virtual production," adds Mr Beardwood.

It means students have to prepare themselves for an ever-evolving industry. They also have incredible transferable skills.

Games technology is used everywhere these days. You'll find it in films, GPS systems, fitness trackers, simulators that train surgeons and pilots, and virtual reality exhibits for everything from golf courses to new houses.

Stuart Butler, a Course Director for the games department, is even involved in a project to digitise museum artefacts.

It's a world away from the days when he was a student at Staffordshire

University – part of the second ever cohort for Computer Games Design. He graduated in 2009, also doing a placement year with a company.

"The technology was quite limited then and computer labs were shared with other courses. Since then, we've had lots of investment," he says. "Although some of the core foundations are still there, the course is quite different now."

But in some ways, Staffordshire University has gone back to the roots of games. On a number of games courses, students also get to explore 'analogue' games. These include board games and fantasy role-playing such as Dungeons and Dragons.

Professor Esther McCallum-Stewart says: "It's really useful for learning about stories in games."

She believes you don't need a quest to be high-tech to enjoy the adventure. It's about immersing yourself in an experience.

"There are dating games, games about pieces of sushi, card games, fishing games and games about knitting. It's role-playing," says Professor McCallum-Stewart. The games her students are working on include an escape room, a game about heart monitors and one where the player becomes a cat.

As part of her research, she's also interested in gaming communities.

"It's all about representation and diversity, starting off with women in games and LGBTQ+ representation. Are they represented in the storytelling and characters?"

The research reflects how much gaming has changed in the last 20 years.

Companies are now reaching out to wider audiences and players no longer fit the stereotype of white, male and straight. Gaming really is for everyone.

## LEVELLING UP

**WHEN OLIVIA CROSS WAS HIRED BY A STUDIO, IT WAS HER EXPERIENCE IN CREATING GAMES AT STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY THAT REALLY MADE HER STAND OUT.**

She graduated in summer 2023 with a degree in Computer Games Design and now works as a Junior Level Designer for Lighthouse Games. During her studies, she was selected to take part in the 1UP summer placement scheme which involved creating real games. Olivia worked on several projects, including the award-winning StaffsVerse game.

The 21-year-old says: "It gave me more professional experience and was just fantastic. It was the closest thing you get to an industry reference."

Olivia set her heart on a career in

the games industry while still at school. But it wasn't until after she started at Staffordshire University that she decided on a specialism.

"I found design and games art my favourite part in my first year. But I ended up falling for level design – it was what I got the most out of in my third year. Level design is about the world the game is held in."

At Lighthouse Games, based in Leamington Spa, she's now putting her specialist skills into action.

"I can't disclose exactly what I'm working on as it's still under wraps. But I'm part of a team of three level designers."



## HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Staffordshire University has launched the '20 Years of Games' initiative to celebrate its milestone anniversary in 2024.

There will be events throughout this academic year, which will bring together staff, students, graduates and representatives from the games industry.

Professor Chris Headleand, Head of Games Development, says: "It's going to be at the cutting edge of games and games research."

**"THERE WILL BE EVENTS THROUGHOUT THIS ACADEMIC YEAR, WHICH WILL BRING TOGETHER STAFF, STUDENTS, GRADUATES AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE GAMES INDUSTRY."**

Highlights will include a Let's Talk Games conference, games jams, a 'women in games bootcamp', captivating exhibitions, insightful panel discussions, a Christmas lecture series and an anniversary dinner. The University will also make special appearances at several national events to help promote games education.

## MARKING MILESTONES



Staffordshire University has also been marking two other major anniversaries.

In 2022-23, we launched the '25/55' celebrations which recognised 25 years of teaching drama and 55 years of film and media.

Staffordshire was one of the first

universities to offer degrees in film, having begun teaching the subject in 1967 at Stoke-on-Trent College of Art.

Today, we remain a champion of the creative industries and have graduates working across film, TV, digital media and the theatre.

# If you Go Down to the Woods Today

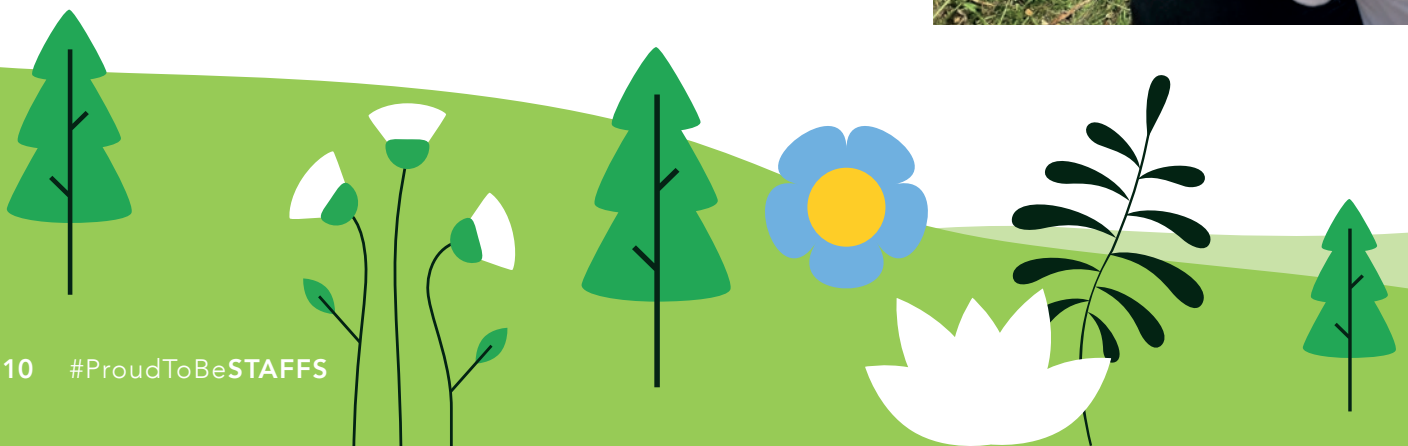
Young people are exploring exciting outdoor learning experiences at Staffordshire University's new Woodlands Forest School.

The sessions are based on the 10-hectare nature reserve at the Stoke-on-Trent campus, which features a pond, river, wood and wildflower meadow. They also have access to part of the £4.4 million Woodlands Day Nursery site – a carbon-neutral building – although the forest school operates separately.

It ties in with the University's aim to be a groundbreaking centre for outdoor teaching, learning and research. Primary and secondary schools can draw on this amazing resource to put sustainability into a real-life context for pupils.

Jane Robb, a Lecturer in Outdoor Learning and Biodiversity, oversees the forest school sessions. Following a pilot in summer 2023, involving Stoke-on-Trent schools and community groups, she is now planning to expand their reach.

Take a wander around the University's new Woodlands Forest School – it's opening up opportunities for people of all ages





Dr Robb said: "We've got lots of ideas. Originally, the vision was more around primary schools and younger groups. Now we've got a much more diverse portfolio. One of the things that's been really nice is we've had a lot of interest from secondary schools.

"We cater for all ages. We've got a mums and toddlers' group and older adults, including an elderly walking group."

Staffordshire University is bringing a forest school experience to the heart of urban Stoke-on-Trent and is helping to build young people's confidence and life skills. All activities are cross-curricular and tailored to the needs of each individual group.

For primary age children, the sessions may include carrying out a range of investigations, exploring different habitats and studying minibeasts along with nature walks, log rolling and creating art.

For older pupils, the activities can help to promote good mental health and wellbeing, with students getting away from the confines of the traditional classroom.

But there's also been scope for

really imaginative links with other school subjects and topics.

Dr Robb said: "I recently had an entire Year 9 group at the forest school. It was Spanish language learning combined with outdoor learning. We went outside to look for different plants and we looked at both the Latin and Spanish versions of the plant names."

**"WE CATER FOR ALL AGES. WE'VE GOT A MUMS AND TODDLERS' GROUP AND OLDER ADULTS, INCLUDING AN ELDERLY WALKING GROUP."**

The students also explored the lake, read a story in Spanish and made their own figures out of clay. It

incorporated aspects of geography and history learning as well.

Other groups to delve into activities at the forest school include young people from YMCA North Staffs. Families from a local refugee support group have also been enjoying the nature reserve and have made corn dollies and nature journals.

University students can use the resources as well, either for their degree projects or to gain outdoor learning ideas if they hope to work with schoolchildren for a career.

"We've had really great feedback. There's a lot going on," added Dr Robb.

Staff from the University's Institute of Education are set to carry out a number of research projects linked to the forest school. Dr Robb is doing consultancy and outreach work with schools to help them to develop outdoor learning within their own school grounds.

The Woodlands Forest School is inspiring lots of different opportunities for people of all ages, not just within the University but in schools and the wider community.



**WOODLANDS**  
Forest School

# VIRTUAL REALITY TRAINING FOR

# FUTURE LIFESAVERS

**Staffordshire University's  
Centre for Health Innovation**

has transformed the  
way healthcare students  
are taught

**Students are using some of the best simulation-based education facilities in the UK at Staffordshire University's £5.8 million Centre for Health Innovation.**

Since the development opened in March 2022, it has transformed the way courses are delivered to more than 2,000 healthcare students. They can practise their skills in a safe environment before working in a real clinical setting.

One of the centre's most impressive features is a giant space powered by virtual reality, where floor-to-ceiling backdrops are projected onto three walls.

In one typical training scenario, students are placed at the scene of a road accident, complete with

passing cars, street lights and noise. They are then asked to extricate a casualty from a vehicle parked inside the room.

The building also includes simulated hospital spaces, where students can follow a patient's journey and practise their bedside manner and care using lifelike mannequins. The interactive models are controlled via tablets and can breathe, show a pulse, contract their eye pupils, move joints and even go into labour.

Based on the Stafford campus, the Centre for Health Innovation (CHI) is part of the University's commitment to combining real-world experiences with digital innovation.

The approach has proved so popular that a further £2.2 million is being invested in new "immersible" facilities at the Stoke-on-Trent campus as well. These will include 12 simulation spaces covering a variety of specialist subjects.

Mike Phillips, Executive Dean of the School of Health, Science and Wellbeing, said: "The feedback we've received from students since opening our Centre for Health Innovation last year has been phenomenal."

The hands-on training enables them to have plenty of action-packed experiences before they go into healthcare settings on placement.



**"ONE OF THE CENTRE'S MOST IMPRESSIVE FEATURES IS A GIANT SPACE POWERED BY VIRTUAL REALITY, WHERE FLOOR-TO-CEILING BACKDROPS ARE PROJECTED ONTO THREE WALLS."**

A patient may arrive via Staffordshire University's training ambulance, which pulls up in an ambulance bay outside. Student paramedics then guide them into a simulated emergency department.

Nursing students can learn how to triage each patient and check their vital signs. They also have facilities set up to mirror a hospital ward, operating theatre and domestic living room.

Dramatic training scenarios include treating stab victims and patients in cardiac arrest. To create the most atmospheric conditions, there are also plug-in odours.

Sessions are recorded via discreet cameras and microphones, so students can look back at their work and learn from their mistakes. This means patient safety practices are integrated into their training.

Mr Phillips added: "The building works brilliantly and the students absolutely love it. This kind of learning is transformational."

CHI is also driving enterprise and innovation as companies are collaborating with the University on projects, including testing and demonstrating products.

One of the technologies has been developed by Voice-Care. It uses artificial intelligence to create an electronic profile of a patient and record observations, preventing the need for reams of paperwork.

Staffordshire University is also working in partnership with CAE Healthcare, a leading provider of simulation-based products. It has been designated as one of just a handful of CAE centres of excellence worldwide.

But the beauty of the technology is it can simulate any type of environment, enabling it to be used across different subjects and for bespoke company training. The immersive training room can even double up as a film set for commercial hire.

## EDUCATED IN THE NAME OF THE LAW

**Students could soon be spending time in a custody suite and prison cell – as part of their degree courses.**

These simulation facilities are being included in a new £2.2 million revamp of the Ashley 2 building on the Stoke-on-Trent campus. It is already home to mock courtrooms, which are used by Law students to learn how to present legal cases.

Now 12 new simulation spaces are being created, including home settings such as bedrooms and living rooms, as well as an office and shop.

Students will also carry out forensic investigations at mock crime scenes and explore how to use digital evidence from phones, computers and smart home technology. And inside the custody suite, they can interact with mock prisoners through role plays. The facilities, which are due to open in spring 2024, will be used by students from a variety of courses including Forensic Science, Law, and Policing and Investigation. They will be able to move seamlessly from crime scene to courtroom.

## LEARNING BY EXPERIENCE

**A terror suspect has just fled on foot after driving into a crowd of students. Some casualties are lying unconscious, while others are panic-stricken and crying for help.**

First on scene are members of Staffordshire University's Campus Safety and Security Service. They need to make split-second decisions as they assess the risks. Will they spot the improvised explosive device on the abandoned car's back seat? And is the suspect still hiding on campus? Within seconds, they are joined by student paramedics, who begin triaging the patients.

Luckily, this is just a major simulation exercise rather than a real incident. It's taking place inside the giant immersive space in the Centre for Health Innovation. It's an incredibly lifelike setting, with images showing the exterior of a campus bar projected onto walls around the room. The mock casualties include volunteers and members of staff, who have had fake blood applied to their faces and limbs. These are the walking wounded. The more seriously injured are mannequins, including a body lying beside the car.

Simulated exercises like this one are a great way to help security staff prepare for real emergencies on campus. It has also given first-year student paramedics an early taste of what to expect on an ambulance shift.

After the training scenario, there is a debriefing. It means everyone has the chance to talk through what's happened and look at what they could have done differently.



# RAISE A CHEER

As Staffordshire Scarlettes celebrate their 20th anniversary, we find out how the University's cheerleading club has become an award-winner

After months of early mornings, extra practice and dress rehearsals, it all comes down to a couple of minutes on the competition mat. A single routine involves as many as 17 stunts, with jumps, motions, tosses and tumbling. Welcome to the exhilarating world of cheerleading.

Staffordshire Scarlettes, which was launched as a Staffordshire University Students' Union club, has just celebrated its 20th anniversary. Made up of students, it has gone from strength to strength and now has a range of cheer teams.

It all began with just five people back in 2003, who turned up to support an American football team. By 2007, the cheerleaders were entering their first competition.

Nowadays, there are around 30 to 40 members each year, although it can be up to 60. The Scarlettes has two competitive teams in different divisions, a pom dance team, four stunt groups and a performance team. There are also drop-in social cheer sessions, where people can get a taste of what it's like.

Head Coach Annie Thompson, who first got involved with the

Scarlettes in 2015 while studying Modern and International History at Staffordshire University, says: "We are seeing a lot more people come through. I think it's attractive because there are different components to cheerleading. You do a bit of gymnastics and jumps. You are also doing dance and stunting.

## "AS SOON AS YOU START DOING STUNTS, IT'S THAT ADRENALINE RUSH. IT'S REALLY INTENSIVE."

"As soon as you start doing stunts, it's that adrenaline rush. It's really intensive. You are throwing people into the air and they have to trust you to catch them. They depend on each other."

Most universities in the UK now have a cheer team and even some secondary schools are getting in on the act. The Scarlettes teams compete every year in the University Nationals and also go to local competitions.

Annie is keen to dispel the myth that cheerleaders simply jump up and down with pom poms. The 27-year-old, who lives in Derbyshire, says: "Cheerleading is now classed as a sport internationally, although it's not been in the Olympics yet."

The Scarlettes regulars even include some male cheerleaders, who particularly enjoy the stunts.

For the 20th anniversary, the squad has recreated one of its crowning moments – the routine that won the 2009 University Nationals. It involved meticulous research, scouring old video footage to piece together the exact sequence and accompanying music.

Past and present members also feature in a celebration video, talking about what it means to be a Scarlette. The lifelong friendships and camaraderie are still strong today.

They have launched a Hall of Fame as well. It recognises three categories of people – founders, 'catalysts' who have helped maintain connections and athletes who have taken the sport further and represented England.



Katie Braund is one of the first cheerleaders to make it into the Hall of Fame. She was a Scarlette while taking a degree in Biochemistry and Microbiology, graduating from Staffordshire University in 2013.

She has gone on to compete for Team England in the World Championships in Florida in both 2022 and 2023, bringing home two silver medals. Katie qualified through being a member of Momentum Cheer, an all-star squad based in Stoke-on-Trent.

The 32-year-old, who lives in the Potteries, says: "When I was in the Scarlettes, I used to think I'd love to go to the Worlds, but wouldn't be good enough. It felt like another world competing in it."

She was part of the adaptive activities division of Team England, where a quarter of the group have disabilities. Katie, who is not disabled herself, says: "It's about making sport accessible. You have to think differently with stunting and be more creative. If somebody in the team is visually impaired, for instance, the flyer might have to keep their foot in the person's hand as they won't see them to catch them."

Katie first tried cheerleading at the age of 11. By the time she joined the Scarlettes it was an integral part of her life.

"It's very much a family environment," she says. "Cheerleading is a multitude of things. It's the challenge of it and the progress and skills. I love that feeling when you've done a really hard stunt. It's also a great way of keeping fit."

Rachel Carter joined the Scarlettes in 2005 when she started a Business Management degree. She now runs an all-star cheerleading programme, RLC Rockets, in Doncaster.

The 36-year-old still has vivid memories of her Scarlettes cheerleading days. "I'd never done anything like it before," she recalls. "I was soon lifting up in the air. Just being part of it was amazing. It's such a unique sport. Everyone was so nice and, if anyone was struggling, the others would help."

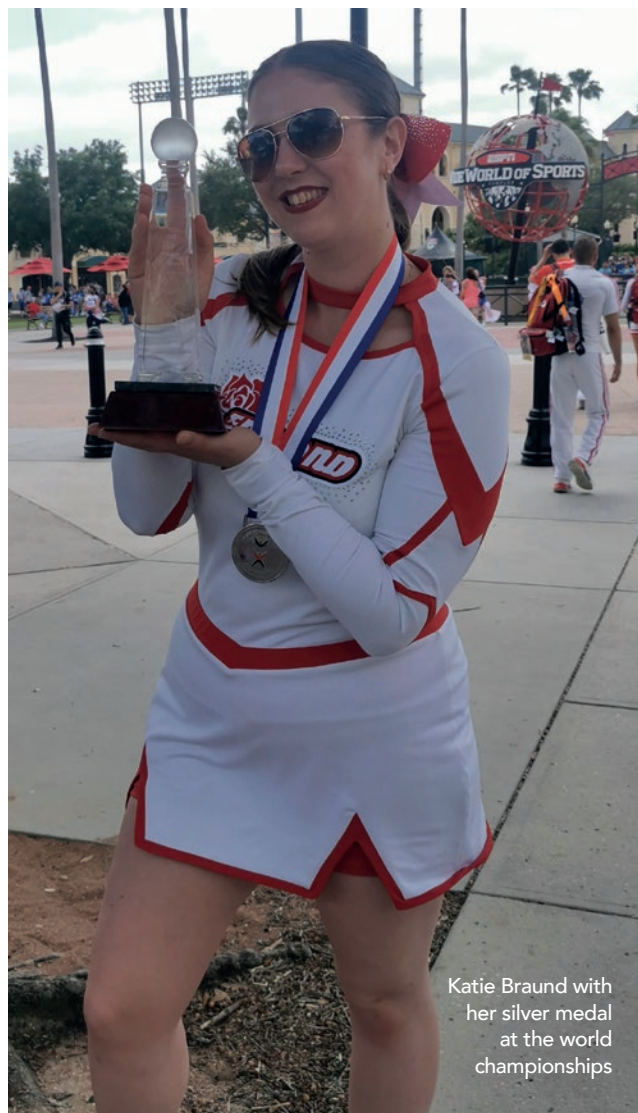
"On Sundays, I would cheer for the American football team come rain or shine. It was so cold sometimes. I'd need a cup of tea afterwards."

After getting involved in competitions, Rachel would train for many hours a week. She attended social events too. "I'll never forget when I lifted one girl in the air. She'd just had a Sunday dinner and said she was a bit heavier."

Through the RLC Rockets squad, she's since been to several World Championships and has also become a judge for other competitions. She adds: "I'm now giving back everything I've learnt."

Her cheerleading skills have come in handy in all sorts of situations.

"I've done a cheerleading stunt on the runway of East Midlands Airport. We've also done it at Disneyland Paris and at weddings."



Katie Braund with her silver medal at the world championships

**"KATIE BRAUND IS ONE OF THE FIRST CHEERLEADERS TO MAKE IT INTO THE HALL OF FAME. SHE WAS A SCARLETTE WHILE TAKING A DEGREE IN BIOCHEMISTRY AND MICROBIOLOGY, GRADUATING FROM STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY IN 2013."**



**The Scarlettes are currently fundraising.**

**You can find out more here**

# HOLDING OUT FOR A HERO

The Your Heroes community awards campaign, organised by Staffordshire University, reaches right into the heart of communities to recognise the likes of Children of Courage, Carers, Community Groups, NHS Heroes and many more.





## Staffordshire University is transforming people, places and society.

**We're a catalyst for change.**

As part of the University's civic agenda, for the second year we have organised the Your Heroes community awards campaign which is sponsored by Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Since March 2023 we have been receiving nominations for children of courage, future stars, charity champions, volunteers, community groups, NHS heroes, emergency services and armed forces personnel who live and work in North Staffordshire and shared them via our [yourheroesawards.co.uk](http://yourheroesawards.co.uk) website and social media channels.

The Your Heroes Awards are about people and place. They shine a light on individuals and groups which are the glue that bind our communities together – and remind us that our main campus here in Stoke-on-Trent is located in a fantastic, friendly city which is home to remarkable people and groups.

After months of nominations and lots of positive publicity, our judges meet to choose the winners ahead of a glittering celebration dinner for more than 250 guests which takes place at the Hilton Double Tree Hotel, Festival Park, Stoke-on-Trent.

At this event our winners, their families and friends rub shoulders with local celebrities, sporting icons, civic dignitaries and business leaders on a night when they are the stars and their incredible stories are told via bespoke films on the big screen.

These heartwarming videos are then shared on social media so they reach the widest possible audience.

The Your Heroes Awards nomination process will open again in March 2024.

Visit: [yourheroesawards.co.uk](http://yourheroesawards.co.uk) to view this year's nominees, for more information about our community campaign and details on how to nominate an individual or group.

# IT'S TO GOOD TO TALK

**TEDxStaffordshireUniversity**  
will be back for 2024  
after a successful  
first event in 2023

**A Pro Vice-Chancellor, alumni, first-year student, Associate Professor and an Honorary Doctor – all from Staffordshire University – were among the lineup at Staffordshire University's first TEDx event.**

The talks included Professor Raheel Nawaz PFHEA NTF, Pro Vice-Chancellor at Staffordshire University, delivering Find Your Path to Happiness by Choosing to be a Giver and Sophie Jackman, a first-year animation student, speaking about the importance of LGBTQ+ in animation.

Associate Professor Anna Francis delivered a talk on How a 100-Year Plan is Regenerating our Community and Honorary Doctor and The Great Pottery Throwdown judge Keith Brymer Jones shared his thoughts on Thinking through Making – My Epiphany With Clay.

Alumni Gemma-Louise Walsh spoke on What Making Art Badly Actually Feels Like and British Ceramics Biennial Artistic Director and Chief Executive Clare Wood discussed Why Everyone Should Love the Arts.

Social entrepreneur Darren Murinas talked about Creating Social Change Through Lived Experience and Josie Morris MBE, Managing Director of Woolcool, spoke about Using Natural Materials to Change the World.

The line-up was completed by George Bettany, co-founder of mental health company Sanctus, giving a talk entitled Home is Just a Breath Away.



**TEDx**  
Staffordshire  
University

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDREN'S



## Associate Professor Richard Jolley gives an insight into his work interpreting children's drawings

Children's drawings are a fascinating window into their hopes, fears and understanding of the world around them.

As they sit down with crayons, paint, pencils and paper, it may look like they are simply doodling or sketching out their creativity. But to a psychologist like Associate Professor Richard Jolley, the child is revealing details about their development, behaviour and inner thoughts.

"There are all sorts of reasons why drawings end up like they do. Being an academic, I want to understand that. I want to problem-solve it," says Dr Jolley, who has worked at Staffordshire University since 1995.

"Drawing is an important sense of communication for children. A picture can tell a thousand words."

His interest in children's understanding of pictures began almost by chance more than 30 years ago while he was a student in York. One of his lecturers was researching partial occlusion – when one image is partly obscured by another.

"If you ask a child to draw a man and a boat, younger children will draw the whole man. They want to show everything about the topic that they think is important," says Dr Jolley.

"They don't care if you can't see everything in front of you, that only the top half of the man is visible from the boat.

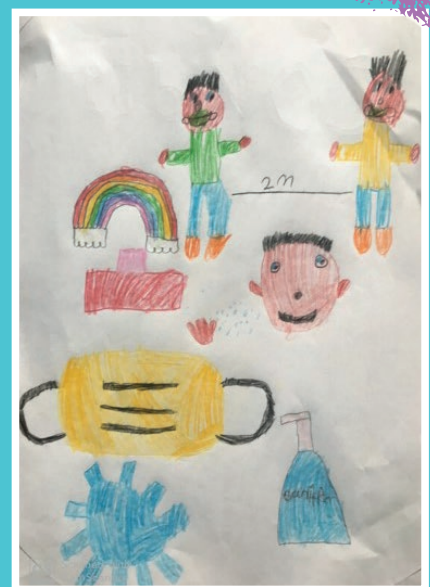
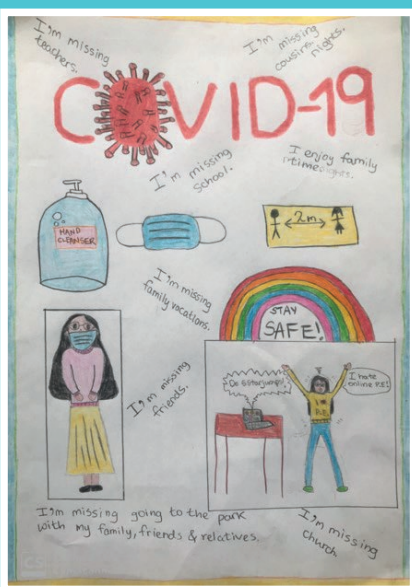
They will draw him above the boat instead. But with older children, they tend more to draw what they see."

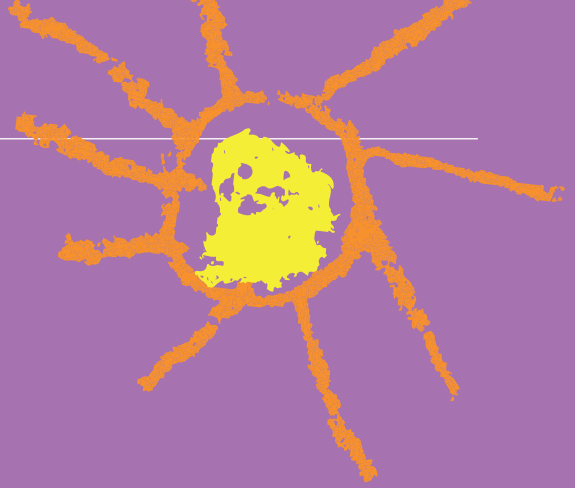
He became intrigued by what these images revealed. He calls it a child's 'pictorial voice'.

Art therapy has long been used to help children open up and express their feelings about trauma or loss. But a drawing can provide insight in a wide variety of contexts. It can also act as a memory aid as we tend to recall events better if we draw them as well as talk about them.

Dr Jolley says: "I look at it from different perspectives – developmental, cognitive, cross-cultural, clinical, educational and even from a religious point of view."

For one of his studies, carried out not long after the Yugoslav war, Croatian children were asked to draw pictures of a friendly soldier and an enemy soldier. Half the group had lost their fathers during the conflict and their images showed a striking bereavement effect. To minimise their sense of fear, they had drawn all the soldiers smaller.





Death and loss also featured as a theme in one of Dr Jolley's most recent projects, which involved a team of colleagues from Staffordshire University. The researchers wanted to explore children's experiences of the Covid-19 pandemic across the UK.

"As horrible as the pandemic was, it presented us with a unique opportunity. We looked at the period from June 2020 to March 2021, covering the lockdowns," he explains.

Altogether, 68 young people took part – aged between four and 14 – and they submitted drawings completed at home. Their pictures showed a high level of emotions, but also a real understanding of the myriad of rules and restrictions. Covid-19 had left an indelible impression on their day-to-day lives.

"The most common themes were friendships and events, followed by people – either someone alone or with their family or social bubble. They drew upon their world," says Dr Jolley.

"There were also prohibited and restricted behaviours, with banned activities shown with a cross. It was not being able to go to school, on holiday or see people. But other pictures showed what they could do, such as Zoom images, family time and exercising outside."

One child drew a sad figure with all four limbs strapped down to what appeared to be a hospital bed – along with the word "constricted". Another drew a Covid cell, writing: "I think Covid is happy and he has stol (sic) my smile." There were also haunting pictures of ghostly figures in house windows.

Seven of the drawings touched on death and loss. It emerged they had been drawn by children who had key workers as parents.

Personal protection also loomed large in children's minds. Their drawings were full of masks and hand sanitiser. Others focused on the virus and how it travelled.

"Their drawings can tell us more than we asked them. They are an important way of finding out about children," says Dr Jolley.

The techniques in children's drawings fall into three main categories. They use literal expression, which covers things like facial features and body position, and then there's

content expression, where they incorporate aspects of the world around them such as rolling hills or sunshine. Thirdly, the pictures use abstract expression, which includes lines, colour, composition, texture and shading.

Adults also use these techniques, which are formed during childhood.

Dr Jolley says: "Drawing images is part of being human. We've got cave paintings going back to 30,000 BC. It's part of the development of children and how they engage with this amazing visual world we are living in."

One of his areas of interest is cross-cultural differences. In one study in China, for instance, children linked school performance with how they felt. In their pictures, a sad day involved getting a bad mark and a happy day was doing well.

For his latest research, Dr Jolley has been working on an international project led by the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. They've been exploring children's drawings of God.

More than 500 Swiss children, aged between six and 15, have taken part and their drawings have now been analysed. The array of pictures spans everything from the story of creation through to heaven and hell.

Some of the drawings have no facial features for God, while others depict the deity as a source of power. One vivid picture has God creating the world out of a globe-shaped jigsaw puzzle.

A few illustrate an angry God, who wants to punish. Yet others show God as a friend and a guide, helping people to choose the right path in life.

There is no one dominant theme to come out of the study. But anyone looking at the images can't help but be amazed at the richness of children's creativity and imagination and the way they have expressed their ideas.

Dr Jolley says: "There are lots of questions. Do children draw more intensely as they get older? What are the main trends – positive or negative?"

He has yet to decide on the focus for his next piece of research. But one thing's for certain – it will be inspired by children's drawings. After more than 30 years of research into them, he is still curious to find out more.







AND THE  
**WINNERS**  
ARE...

Meet the winners  
of the inaugural  
Staffordshire University  
Business Awards



**An energy company with a projected annual turnover of £100 million, several inspirational Staffs alumni and a charity that provides free food for people in need were among the winners at the inaugural Staffordshire University Business Awards.**

More than 330 guests attended a black tie dinner and awards ceremony in our flagship Catalyst building at Staffordshire University where accolades were presented in 11 categories including Business of the Year, Small Business of the Year, Entrepreneur of the Year, Growth and Innovation.

GivEnergy was one of the evening's big winners, scooping both the Business of the Year and the Growth Awards – and being highly commended for the Innovation Award and the Business in the Community Award.

A lifetime achievement award was presented to Staffs alumni Gary Mellor of Beswicks Legal and Beswicks Sports for his contributions to the legal industry and the world of sports agency – not just regionally but nationally and internationally.

Individual prizes were also presented to Adam Whitehouse of TMT First who was named Entrepreneur of the Year and Staffs alumni Daniel Waterman of Carse and Waterman who was named Alumni Business Person of the Year.

Meanwhile Staffs alumni artist Chloe Breeze was named Young Business Person of the Year and Alex Wixon of Capula was named Apprentice of the Year.

Other winners included Best of British Beer receiving the Small Business of the Year Award, PFE Medical winning the Innovation Award and KMF winning the Skills for the Future Award.

Affordable Food Stoke won the Team of the Year Prize and was joint winner of the Business in the Community Award, alongside Holdcroft Heating and Gas Fitting.

Professor Martin Jones, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Staffordshire University, said: "Staging the Staffordshire University Business Awards reinforces our commitment to being a civic university and a catalyst for change not only for our own students but for the communities within which we are based.

"Our aim was to recognise and reward the skill, creativity and endeavour of the business community in Staffordshire. The awards campaign shone a light on the wealth-creators, the entrepreneurs and the innovators and it was a pleasure to see so many of them recognised.

"The awards evening was a #proudtobestaffs celebration of world-class talent and the culmination of an awards campaign which attracted an incredible number of entries that told stories about exciting new products and services and the stand-out individuals and companies behind them.

"I'd like to thank our generous sponsors and our extremely diligent and hard-working judges and of course congratulate all of the winners."

Martin Tideswell, the Director of Communities and Commercial Engagement at Staffordshire University, added: "Our Awards campaign 2023 began back in January when our first nominations were received.

"We have since have published more than 130 nomination articles on our bespoke website and shared these across our social media channels daily.

"These articles – for which every nominee is interviewed – are just one of the elements which make the Staffordshire University's Business Awards unique.

"Our campaign also seeks to enrich and expand Staffordshire University's already strong connections with employers and business leaders – while underlining our status as a civic university which aims to champion the communities we serve.

"The Staffordshire University Business Awards is a genuine collaboration which could not happen without the support of our sponsors and supporters who have been instrumental in our campaign and helped to shape our celebration."

The Staffordshire University Business Awards is sponsored by: Stoke-on-Trent City Council, Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, KMF Group, Beswicks Legal, SG Fleet UK, Stoke-on-Trent College, Stoke City Football Club, PlinkFizz, RBC Brewin Dolphin, KPI Recruiting, Rydale Roofing, Stoke-on-Trent City Centre BID, Dains Accountants, Synectics Solutions, Waterworld and Netbiz.



**"MORE THAN 330 GUESTS ATTENDED A BLACK TIE DINNER AND AWARDS CEREMONY IN OUR FLAGSHIP CATALYST BUILDING AT STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY WHERE ACCOLADES WERE PRESENTED IN 11 CATEGORIES INCLUDING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR, SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR, ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR, GROWTH AND INNOVATION."**

# OUR INAUGURAL AWARD WINNERS

## Lifetime Achievement Award

---

Gary Mellor

## Business of the Year

---

**WINNER:** GivEnergy

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Reliance Medical

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Woolcool

## Small Business of the Year

---

**WINNER:** Best of British Beer

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Promtek

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Carse and Waterman

## Entrepreneur of the Year

---

**WINNER:** Adam Whitehouse

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Jan Wong

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Tom Wilkinson

## Apprentice of the Year

---

**WINNER:** Alex Wixon, Capula

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Kathryn Arnot, Haughton Design

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Rachel Shingler, UHNM

## Innovation Award

**WINNER:** PFE Medical

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Mirage Ltd

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** GivEnergy

## Growth Award

**WINNER:** GivEnergy

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Reliance Medical

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Comp Door

## Young Business Person of the Year

**WINNER:** Chloe Breeze

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Reece Thornton-Bate

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Tom Yorke

## Team of the Year

**WINNER:** Affordable Food Stoke

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** SGFleet

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Daily Focus

## Skills For The Future

**WINNER:** KMF

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** TMT First

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Carse and Waterman

## Business in the Community

**WINNER:** Holdcroft Heating and Gas Fitting Ltd

**WINNER:** Affordable Food Stoke

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** GivEnergy

## Alumni Business Person of the Year

**WINNER:** Daniel Waterman

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Paul Drew

**HIGHLY COMMENDED:** Dr Najam Kidwai



# EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS



**The Peter Coates MSc Entrepreneurship** is creating an ecosystem of new businesses to drive the region's economy forward. We found out more

**In January 2023, Staffordshire University launched the Peter Coates MSc Entrepreneurship programme, a course designed to support anyone with entrepreneurial ambitions to positively impact on the region through the creation of scalable, sustainable and investable businesses.**

Our MSc Entrepreneurship is unlike any other traditional academic programme – it is specifically designed to enable entrepreneurs to identify opportunities and then test and iterate their business ideas throughout the course.

The fundamental concept of the programme is that it is practical, experiential and applied – at every stage students apply what they have learnt to the development of their business idea.

The course has been specifically designed to enable students to gain the skills and experience they need to become successful entrepreneurs.

So, what makes a successful entrepreneur? Dr Laura Walton-Williams, Director of Enterprise Education for Staffordshire

University and co-creator of the MSc Entrepreneurship, is keen to stress that entrepreneurs come from all walks of life.

She said: “We currently have 70 students studying on our Masters programme and they have incredibly diverse life experiences and business ideas. Their drive and ambition to create businesses that are innovative, impactful and aim to fundamentally solve a problem is the key aspect they all have in common.”

In order to inspire the students to create businesses that have the potential to thrive, the team has implemented creative and entrepreneurial approaches to course delivery. Firstly, every aspect of the programme is co-taught by academics and entrepreneurs, providing content supported by both lived experience and pioneering research.

Successful entrepreneurs from a wide range of sectors contribute to the programme through weekly live podcasts and Q&A sessions.

The course isn't delivered through a traditional lecture approach – instead

students explore their entrepreneurial self as well as key entrepreneurial concepts and methods through facilitated sessions using methods such as Playmobil Pro, Performative Storytelling, Customer Empathy Mapping and Spotlight Sessions.

Fundamentally, the team has taken an entrepreneurial approach to the design and delivery of the programme in the belief this is the best way to engage and develop entrepreneurial minds.

As the programme continues to evolve and grow, Dr Susan Sisay, Course Director for Entrepreneurship, welcomes applications and contributions from our alumni community: “If you are interested in finding out more, either with a view to joining the course next September or to contributing to the course in the future, through sharing your own entrepreneurial experiences or providing financial support, we would be delighted to hear from you. Many of the current students are Staffordshire University alumni, so please get in touch if you have any questions.”



**“WE CURRENTLY HAVE 70 STUDENTS STUDYING ON OUR MASTERS PROGRAMME AND THEY HAVE INCREDIBLY DIVERSE LIFE EXPERIENCES AND BUSINESS IDEAS..”**

For full details on the Peter Coates MSc Entrepreneurship, visit [www.staffs.ac.uk/course/entrepreneurship-peter-coates-msc](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/course/entrepreneurship-peter-coates-msc)

# A SPORTING CHANCE

**Staffordshire University was proud to present a Lifetime Achievement Award to alumni Gary Mellor at our inaugural Business Awards.**

Gary is Managing Partner and owner at Beswicks Legal and founder/director of Beswicks Sports – two prominent Stoke-on-Trent businesses that have international reach, while maintaining strong ties to, and great pride in, the local area.

Gary began working at Beswicks as a Legal Executive 42 years ago on leaving Trentham High School. He completed a law degree at what is now Staffordshire University – attending ‘night school’ over a period of four years. During his training contract he experienced many different types of law before spending a decade as an advocate in the criminal law department.

In 1999 Gary decided to combine his legal expertise with his passion for sport, establishing Beswicks Sports – a global sports management operation based in Stoke-on-Trent. Gary not only represents top-flight footballers and other sports people (having had a significant role in assembling the squad which led Stoke City to the Premier League), he has

specialist knowledge of sports law and is ranked among the elite sports lawyers nationwide by the Legal 500. He is also an FA registered intermediary and a member of the British Association for Sport and Law.

Not satisfied with advising and representing footballers in the UK, Gary had a vision to take his love of the game to the U.S. where he started a team from the very beginning in the United Soccer League, becoming founder and director of Orlando City. Gary helped to shape Orlando City from being an underperforming minor league team to an MLS club with regular attendances of 20,000+.

The journey took Orlando City to Major League Soccer and now the team plays in one of the best soccer specific stadiums in North America and has some of the most passionate fans in the world. Soccer is, of course, now the fastest growing sport in the United States – something Gary has been at the forefront of.

Despite his globetrotting Gary has never forgotten his Stoke-on-Trent roots. He is a trustee of the Stoke City Community Trust, a Stoke City FC charity that uses football to engage with people of all ages, abilities and



**From studying for a part-time law degree to setting up an international sports agency that negotiates the sale of football clubs, alumni Gary Mellor’s career progression has been phenomenal. We find out more about his success story.**



social backgrounds on inclusion, health and wellbeing and education projects that benefit people in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire.

Gary has personally, and through Beswicks Legal and Beswicks Sports, raised and donated tens of thousands of pounds for local causes including the Douglas MacMillan (Dougie Mac) Hospice.

As an alumni, he is also a passionate supporter of Staffs Uni graduates – ensuring talented law graduates receive work placements, jobs and training contracts at Beswicks Legal.

Locally, nationally and internationally Gary is extremely well-known, well-liked and respected. This was recognised recently by the University Campus of Football Business (UCFB) which gave Gary an Honorary Fellowship.

Through hard work, an entrepreneurial spirit and boundless energy he has created two enormously successful businesses that are known for providing levels of expertise and service often only associated with big city firms, while looking after employees and clients in a typically warm and caring Stoke-on-Trent way.

**“GARY NOT ONLY REPRESENTS TOP-FLIGHT FOOTBALLERS AND OTHER SPORTS PEOPLE (HAVING HAD A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN ASSEMBLING THE SQUAD WHICH LED STOKE CITY TO THE PREMIER LEAGUE), HE HAS SPECIALIST KNOWLEDGE OF SPORTS LAW AND IS RANKED AMONG THE ELITE SPORTS LAWYERS NATIONWIDE BY THE LEGAL 500.”**



# AN ANIMATED LIFE



Daniel Waterman moved to Stoke-on-Trent to study animation at Staffordshire University and never left. He co-founded Carse and Waterman with fellow student Gary Carse during their degree then the pair stayed in the city after graduating to run a business that has worked with the likes of The Prodigy, Santander, the NHS and ITV. Daniel was named Alumni Business Person of the Year at the Staffordshire University Business Awards. We found out more about his success story.



### Tell us your University story. Why did you choose to study at Staffordshire?

My journey started coming to Staffs Uni for an interview for a foundation course in art and design. I always wanted to be an animator. I had the really clichéd vision of 'I want to be an animator and I want to work for Pixar'. I've realised now as an employer in this industry for many years that you get really tired of hearing about wanting to be an animator for Pixar.

So I did my foundation here and then I did three years on the 3D animation course as well. It was a remarkable journey. There was a lot of hard work and a lot of amazing luck and opportunities that came our way to allow us to grow a company and to be sat here today talking about it.

### How did you come to launch a business while you were still a student?

I'm from just outside London and my business partner, Gary Carse, is from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. We met in the middle, studying in Stoke.

We, we didn't know each other and just happened to sit next to each other on our first day of our animation course. We started chatting and realised we weren't particularly interested in the University social scene but were both quite proud nerds.

We were interested in creating animated films and we weren't so

fussed about going out. We started talking and found that we would work quite well together. We started writing different short stories and working together to create them. It was a partnership that just formed naturally over a love of different animations from South Park to Looney Tunes to the work of Pixar.

Within six months we started looking for projects to take on and challenge us a bit outside of the work we were doing for university and we were actually helping each other out on our university work. We started just looking for work and looking for opportunities and boy did one come along in the shape of a music video for The Prodigy.

### Your big break was making a music video for The Prodigy. How did you make that happen?

It came out of absolutely nowhere. We didn't see it coming. We weren't even looking for that opportunity. We thought anything like that would be way out of our league at that point as first year students.

Gary was invited to his old college up in Newcastle-upon-Tyne to speak to students in the year below him and explain what it's like to be at university and try to help people at college understand what to expect when they go to university. They just happened to invite another guest speaker from a production company in London. Gary started talking to this director and six months later he remembered us when

he was tasked with creating a music video for The Prodigy. He needed some animators and he knocked on our door.

The opportunity just landed in our laps. We realised that this was going to be an internationally watched music video for a massive band and that the production company was putting a lot of faith in us to do something really good.

We hadn't even worked out what we were good at yet. We were really just learning the ropes. Looking back now it blows my mind that opportunity happened. But it did happen and we worked incredibly hard to try and make it work.

The really surreal moment happened in the student union bar, the Ember Lounge. We were sat there and the music video came on one of the TVs just randomly. It was a very odd moment.

### Was that when Carse and Waterman was born? Was that when you realised you had a business on your hands?

Not yet. Gary and I never expected to run a business. That was so far from our radar. It's not entirely clear actually when that moment happened. It was such an organic moment. I just remember we were students and then there was this one moment when we were talking about company names. It was actually in the Wetherspoons in

Hanley and we were just talking about company names and no way did we ever think it would go anywhere. We wanted to create a company because we didn't want people to know we were students. That was the entire reason. Had we been sat around that table 13 years ago thinking of a company name that was going to live beyond our student years, we might have gone for something slightly different than Carse and Waterman.

**You were working for some really big clients who didn't realise you were students, weren't you?**

Absolutely. It was a very surreal time. We were working with ad agencies and they had no idea that they were sending their work to a company based in a student house in Shelton.

We did an advert for Santander which had Lewis Hamilton in it. That was another surreal project because we got to film on set for that one. There was even a moment when we were on set where I got accosted by someone with a camera doing a 'making of' film who interviewed us about what we were doing.

Throughout my career I've always felt imposter syndrome. However successful we've been, I've always felt that sense of how am I here? But, you know, nothing can compare to being a first year student, being on a film location set and someone coming and saying, can you talk about what you're doing for the making of film. It's still on YouTube.

**Fast forward to your graduation. Did you think of going off and working for animation companies outside Staffordshire?**

By that point we had built up an army of people around us that were keen to continue working for Carse and Waterman and an army of people that were looking to Carse and Waterman to create things.

So we saw the opportunity to do something that we wanted and we thought let's go for it and try to take Carse and Waterman to that next level.

There was a point where we were trying to work out what Carse and

Waterman looks like post-university. It was 2011 and we'd done a bit of research. I studied a bit about business to try and understand, because obviously at that point I knew nothing about business.

We saw a huge opportunity to create something new and fresh in a city like Stoke-on-Trent and we already had a good relationship with Staffordshire University. We had a good relationship with people locally that had the skills and the talent we needed and we felt we could do something different and special here.

We've always been really proud of the fact that we're sort of from Stoke-on-Trent and grew the company here. Even though for the first five to eight years 100% of our work was coming from outside of Stoke-on-Trent.

**Do you think you'd have been as successful if you'd moved elsewhere, if you'd have pitched up in London or Manchester or Birmingham?**

No, I don't think so. I think for both Gary and I, Stoke gave us a what I would call a buffer. It allowed us to get some office space relatively cheaply. It allowed us to set up and learn on the job. Had we gone to London or Manchester that cost would have been significantly higher and we would have had to have learned much quicker.

And I don't think we would have been able to learn at the speed required to grow the company that we have. And so for us, I'm very grateful that we were given that time to grow the business and put the effort in and the time in to create what we have.

**Can you tell us more about the work you do?**

Our film and TV work seems to interest people most. We did some visual effects for Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway. We've done some work for BBC's Inside No. 9. We've added visual effects to something like 20 to 25 feature films. But that's actually a small percentage of the work that we do.

A lot of the work we do is actually business comms, business advertising,

marketing, that side of things. We've really pushed the idea that animation is an incredibly powerful communication tool. It makes boring things fun.

**How many people do you employ and how many of those are Staffs Uni alumni?**

We employ 10 people and I'm confident nine of them are Staffs Uni alumni. We've got a great relationship with the University, the University is constantly telling students about the work we're doing and we support them as they go through the course.

**You do a lot of work with young people in the community. Are they surprised they could have an animation career in their home city?**

Absolutely. There's a lot of people that didn't even know it was happening in this country. This idea that animation and film special effects is all done in America is a really common misconception. And, you know, there was a time when it was, but it's changed now.

Within Stoke-on-Trent there's a range of companies doing really exciting things, working with some of the biggest brands in the world and you don't need to leave the city.

**Rewind back to teenage Daniel, just starting his degree at Staffs Uni. What would he have made of what you're doing now?**

I think he wouldn't believe it. I always wanted to work in TV and film. I was very patient with my time. I would just commit days to making something. I remember I wanted a script of a James Bond movie and I couldn't find it anywhere. So I just sat and wrote down word for word the script for the James Bond movie. So I think the fact that I got to go to college to study it, was mind blowing to me.

And I think every step along the way, I've just been really excited about what I'm doing and learning and what it's unlocking in my ability. I think for me, the teenage me going to university would have just been mind-blowing because I never thought I would go to university.

# STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY

# RESEARCH



Forensic experts at Staffordshire University and the Forensic Capability Network (FCN) are developing a new system which could revolutionise how evidence is used in domestic violence and sexual assault cases.

Claire Gwinnett, Professor in Forensic and Environmental Science, said: "In cases that involve strangers, forensic strategies can be used to link an offender to a crime with evidence such as DNA. However, in domestic violence cases it is often a partner or someone known to the victim who commits the crime which makes it harder to link forensic evidence to a specific incident."

To combat this, Gwinnett and colleagues are developing an automated system to recover and analyse large samples of trace evidence – such as fibres or DNA from victims' clothing – which could be used to reconstruct events and corroborate witness statements.

The project combines Staffordshire University's patented Easylift® forensic tape alongside Spectricon's SMMART microscope.

"This is not done currently because it is time consuming and logistically not possible to manually identify trace evidence on this scale and find meaning in it," Gwinnett explained.

She added: "We want to improve the victim's experience so that the focus is away from them and more on the forensic evidence. Ultimately, we hope this will act as a deterrent to criminals in the long run."



## PROFESSOR RECOGNISED FOR SERVICES TO PODIATRY PROFESSION

Professor Nachiappan Chockalingam, Director of the Centre for Biomechanics and Rehabilitation Technologies, has received an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal College of Podiatry.

This fellowship is conferred upon individuals who have made a substantive and significant contribution to the advancement of the podiatric profession in clinical practice, education, service management or research.

With support from colleagues and collaborators within the profession, Professor Chockalingam has contributed to the development of musculoskeletal podiatry in the United Kingdom.

He has supervised and trained numerous podiatrists through the University's postgraduate provision. His globally recognised research on foot and footwear biomechanics has helped in scientific understanding of the mechanics of the foot and has provided evidence for clinical practice.

Professor Chockalingam said: "Receiving this fellowship is not just my own achievement; it represents the hard work of all the people I have worked with, from the podiatry profession and all those students for their dedication and unwavering belief in the power of knowledge and the pursuit of excellence."



# ACADEMICS CENTRAL TO HOLOCAUST ENQUIRY



**“THE CAMPS IN ALDERNEY WERE SIGNIFICANT IN THE HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST BECAUSE THEY WERE SITED ON BRITISH SOIL. ”**

Experts from the Centre of Archaeology are playing a leading role in a government enquiry into deaths on Alderney during Nazi occupation.

Lord Pickles, the UK’s Post Holocaust Issues Envoy, is leading a review of the evidence into the numbers of prisoners who died on the Channel island which has been subject of considerable speculation.

The camps in Alderney were significant in the history of the Holocaust because they were sited on British soil. Lord Pickles has now appointed a team of eleven independent and internationally recognised experts to review existing research and historic records to identify the “most accurate”

number of people who died under the occupation.

The panel includes Staffordshire University’s Professor Caroline Sturdy Colls, Associate Professor Kevin Colls, and Dr Daria Cherkaska who have examined the remnants of concentration and labour camps on the island and scoured archives around the world for information about the people sent there.

They have published a book ‘Adolf Island’: *The Nazi Occupation of Alderney*, based on their extensive archival research and in-field investigations which first began in 2009. Their work also featured in a documentary “Adolf Island” which first aired on Smithsonian channel in 2019.

## FOOTBALL – ‘A WOMAN’S GAME’

**Sport and exercise experts at Staffordshire University are helping to make women’s football a level playing field.**

Dr Jacky Forsyth and Dr Alex Blackett are part of the Erasmus+ funded project European Women in Sport (E-WinS) which is researching ways to support women’s football, at all levels, across six European countries.

Through this EU funding, they are currently offering local clubs free workshops to help with their development, including Stoke City FC Women and Port Vale FC Women. The research focuses on financial aspects, such as sponsorship, media coverage and visibility of women’s football, as well as performance aspects, which includes information on the menstrual cycle, hormonal contraception, pregnancy and childcare.

Building on research work around the menstrual cycle, they have also recruited a PhD researcher, match-funded by Staffordshire University and Stoke FC women, to optimise practices based on ovarian hormones in relation to performance, injury avoidance, training and health.

Dr Forsyth said: “Currently, less than 1% of research spending on football is on women, despite the elite women’s game having grown in popularity in recent years. For this reason, it is important to continue high-level research on women’s football.”



# RESEARCHERS CALL FOR MORE BREASTFEEDING FRIENDLY SPACES



A group of mums and researchers from Staffordshire University have teamed up to help create more breastfeeding friendly spaces in Stoke-on-Trent.

Health psychologists at the University recruited nine members of The Breastfeeding Network in Stoke-on-Trent to investigate how well public places in the local area accommodate breastfeeding parents.

The co-researchers spent several weeks documenting their experiences at locations including health centres,

shopping centres, retail shops, supermarkets, plus leisure locations like zoos and theme parks.

Dr Amy Burton, who led the project, said: "A welcoming staff member, breastfeeding welcome signs, comfortable seating, family rooms with toys to entertain older children and space for a pushchair or buggy were all seen as positive ways to make breastfeeding parents feel comfortable and supported."

Some 'family rooms' designated for

breastfeeding, however, were found to be unsuitable, with seating being next to or situated within a toilet, poor lighting, and a lack of sanitary space to breastfeed.

Based on the findings, free resources have been created with 'top tips?' for local businesses and organisations. Dr Burton added: "We hope that these free resources will help small changes to be made which could make a big difference for those who breastfeed in Stoke-on-Trent."

## TWO STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS NAMED AMONG BEST SCIENTISTS IN THE WORLD

Professor Chris Gidlow and Professor Martin Jones have been included in Best Scientists in the World 2023 rankings on Research.com, which is based on a D-index (Discipline H-index) metric for papers and citation values of at last 20 for discipline areas.

Data has been drawn for a wide range of sources including OpenAlex and CrossRef. The bibliometric data for evaluating the citation-based metrics were gathered at the end of December 2022.

Professor Jones is ranked #659 in the world ranking and #107 in United Kingdom in the area of Political Science. He is recognised for research in the political science field of state, politics, political economy, restructuring and economic governance. His state studies combine topics in areas such as economic growth, performance studies, globalisation and public administration, also integrating fields such as politics and relational space.

Under Professor Jones's leadership, research excellence sits at the heart of Staffordshire University's strategic plan as the institution aspires to be one of the leading UK modern universities for research excellence.

Professor Gidlow is ranked #4954 in the world ranking and #824 in the United Kingdom in the area of Social Sciences. His scientific interests cover health improvement and health inequalities, with a growing interest in multiple disadvantage and homelessness.

PROFESSOR  
JONES IS  
RANKED #659  
IN THE WORLD  
RANKING AND  
#107 IN UNITED  
KINGDOM  
IN THE AREA  
OF POLITICAL  
SCIENCE



Professor Martin Jones

PROFESSOR  
GIDLOW IS  
RANKED #4954  
IN THE WORLD  
RANKING AND  
#824 IN THE  
UNITED KINGDOM  
IN THE AREA OF  
SOCIAL SCIENCES



Professor Chris Gidlow

# HONOUR ED TO MEET YOU

The University's Development and Alumni Relations team has launched an Honorary Doctors' Society (Hon Doc Soc) to bring together members of an important community.





Honorary Doctorates are the highest award Staffordshire University can bestow and our recipients – who come from all walks of life, ages, backgrounds and industries – are a diverse and extremely influential and well-connected group of people.

They include world-renowned business leaders, entrepreneurs, academics, Olympians and philanthropists.

The aim of the ‘Hon Doc Soc’ is to create a vibrant new community and provide our Honorary Doctors with the latest information about developments at Staffs so that they can continue to be terrific ambassadors for us and to enable them to network with other key influencers who have a strong connection to the University or the county of Staffordshire.



Our first event took place in June, 2023 at our Leek Road campus in Stoke-on-Trent, where guests were able to engage with students who were due to graduate in the July and exhibited their work at our annual Degree Show. They also heard from staff at our new, ground-breaking and award-winning Woodlands Day Nursery and Forest School, our amazing virtual production studios and our pioneering Innovation Enterprise Zone (IEZ).



Our Hon Doc Soc has the opportunity to meet in person three times per year and members will also receive regular correspondence to keep our Honorary Doctors informed of key developments here at Staffordshire University.

The second Hon Doc Soc gathering is taking place at our Centre for Health Innovation in Stafford in December 2023 where visitors will be able to view our sector-leading immersive technology, engage with students and hear from both our Deputy CEO and CFO Sally McGill and our Executive Dean for Health, Science and Wellbeing, Mike Phillips.



# MEET OUR NEW HONORARY DOCTORS

Staffordshire University  
bestowed Honorary  
Degrees on 12 worthy  
individuals in 2023.

## Amit Shah

From portraying Rishi Sunak in comedy *The Windsors* to a murderer in *Happy Valley*, Amit Shah's many and varied acting roles have made him a familiar face to TV viewers.



**The Staffordshire University alumni will soon appear in a Netflix film alongside Emily Blunt, Chris Evans and Andy Garcia directed by Harry Potter director David Yates and will be in a new play with Greg Wise that's being tipped for a West End run.**

The big star names keep coming as Amit talks about his forthcoming projects. There's an episode of Vera and a drama about the Post Office scandal in the pipeline, where Amit will play a postmaster wrongly accused of crime.

Yet he is humble, modest and thoroughly grounded. It was only during an undergraduate degree at Staffordshire University that Amit started to believe that he could succeed in an acting career.

He explains: "To the surprise of most of my school mates, I was cast as the lead in the annual school play at the age of 16 in 1997. It was a shock because I had not really shown a huge amount of interest or skill in this area up until this point.

"However my Drama teacher, Mr Hill, saw some indication I guess. The success of the play was enough to spur me on to choose Drama and Theatre Arts as an A level and then the natural progression seemed to be to study Drama at a university where I could throw myself into the uni experience but also immerse myself into the world of acting.

"However, even at this point I didn't truly believe that I could sustain a career as a jobbing actor. The course at Staffs was very well presented in the UCAS book and seemed to match the areas of this subject that interested and inspired me.

"When I arrived during Freshers' week, I discovered the Drama Society and it seemed to make sense to join and fill my spare time outside of studies with the practical experience of performing.

"When I wasn't studying for my degree I was putting on a play with the Drama Society and when I wasn't doing either of those things. I was watching films on my TV/VHS combo

unit in my tiny bedroom. I guess I was combining the hard work ethic that my parents had instilled in me with my love for acting which had come quite some way since the school play.

"In my final year at Staffs one of the tutors who had trained at LAMDA himself took me aside and suggested that it might be worth me applying to the prestigious London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art for a place on the postgraduate course.

"This suggestion infused me with a confidence and purpose and that maybe a career as an actor was not as far-fetched as I thought.

"The Staffs Uni experience was a crucial platform for me to build my foundations as an actor and from which I could really launch myself towards my dream of performing."

It was during his time at LAMDA that Amit auditioned for Andrew Lloyd Webber's new West End musical, Bombay Dreams. His sister had convinced him to give it a go.

"I'll never forget the day I received a call from the producer to offer me a role - usually these offers come through an agent but I didn't even have one of those yet."

LAMDA gave him permission to graduate four weeks early to start rehearsals for what was his first professional job - a 12-month contract in a West End musical.

Four years of professional theatre jobs in the West End and for the National Theatre followed, which he says served as almost a second course of training.

"I had the privilege of working with creatives and actors who were simply the best at what they do and the live experience was totally unforgiving and at the same time totally exhilarating.

"However, I always remembered myself as a young boy being fascinated by film and I knew I wanted to perform on screen. So that's where I focused my attention."

From 2013 Amit turned his attention to film and TV, a medium he says gives him huge creative satisfaction.

He credits his role in Happy Valley as one of the highlights of his career to date.

"Happy Valley has really changed the outlook of my career and I will be ever grateful to Sally Wainwright for that opportunity."

It was during the broadcast weeks of Happy Valley that Amit received a letter offering him an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Arts from Staffordshire University.

He adds: "I could not believe what I was reading. This wavering of belief has been a constant for me which has helped me manage expectations but has also allowed me to be surprised when good things have happened and even though I've lacked belief I've still been able to somehow maintain my drive and ambition.

"This offer from Staffs is an honour I could have never imagined and it reminds me of the journey I've been on and also makes me realise the opportunity I have to represent and support the University as I continue on this journey.

"This is a very proud moment for me. Staffordshire University is very close to my heart. The whole of Staffordshire University have been so supportive over the years - it's where it all started for me in a way."

**"THE STAFFS UNI EXPERIENCE WAS A CRUCIAL PLATFORM FOR ME TO BUILD MY FOUNDATIONS AS AN ACTOR AND FROM WHICH I COULD REALLY LAUNCH MYSELF TOWARDS MY DREAM OF PERFORMING."**



**The Chief Executive Officer of All Saints Catholic Collegiate Multi-Academy and a national leader of education, Margaret Yates has dedicated her career to moulding young minds.**

Previously the executive head of St Gregory's Catholic Academy in Longton and St Augustine's Catholic Academy in Meir, Margaret has worked at schools across North Staffordshire

during a long and distinguished career. Born in the North East, her family moved to Stoke-on-Trent when the coal mines closed so she was educated in the city.

She says she was inspired by her father, who grew up in poverty as the youngest of 13 children but enrolled to study at Staffordshire University at the age of 40.

"He says education changed his life," said Margaret. "As a result I was brought up with plays and poetry to read. That gave me my love for literature."

Margaret went to an all-girls convent school where she says she underachieved 'through nobody's fault but my own'.

After school she started an NHS job working as a cardiology technician including research into preparation for the Potteries Marathon. Fascinating as she found that early career, she longed to become a teacher.

Following her father's example, she enrolled on a four-year Education

degree at Staffordshire University at the age of 29.

"I enjoyed every moment of being at University," she said.

Once qualified Margaret was quickly fast-tracked into leadership roles in teaching.

"I didn't have aspirations to be a headteacher," she said. "I just wanted to be a really excellent teacher." But within eight years she was the deputy head of 'a really high achieving school.

"At that time I also became an advanced skills teacher in literacy, working across city schools and leading on projects."

Margaret studied for a Masters degree, by which point she was a headteacher at St Mary's in Norton.

Other senior appointments were to follow, including sitting on the West Midlands Headteacher Board.

"I thrive on seeing improvements in skills," she said. "That's what motivates me. I believe in investing in resources to make sure that everybody in the city gets a very good education."



**Prison officer, journalist, Government advisor, director of an international charity – Ian Acheson's career has been nothing if not varied.**

He is an expert in the UK's criminal justice system and specifically the prevention of Islamist and right-wing radicalisation in its prison system and the post-release threat of terrorist offenders.

In 2016 Ian was asked by the Government to lead a landmark independent review of Islamist

extremism in prisons and the probation service which led to transformational change in the way the UK manages ideologically inspired offenders.

Born in Enniskillen in Northern Ireland in 1968, Ian moved to England to study politics at Durham University from 1986 to 1989 followed by a short stint as a trainee manager at Coutts Bank. "I had no aptitude or interest in finance," he says. "I come from a uniformed family – the Army, police etc so going into the uniformed services was always in the back of my head."

A journalism career followed banking, working for BBC Radio Ulster and then as a reporter for Ballymena Guardian, but a recruitment brochure for HM Prison Service that promised 'this is a career where you will find out who you are' turned his head.

Ian worked for HM Prison Service for around a decade including as a prison officer, principal officer, manager of a wing and finally a prison governor.

He then became the Director of Prisoners Abroad, an international charity.

Senior civil service roles followed

including time as Director of Community Safety at the Home Office.

Ian left the civil service to launch what was to become a successful executive coaching company, Reboot, combining his loves for walking and talking. He was enjoying self-employed life until Michael Gove rang in 2016.

"He said I'd like you to investigate Islamic extremism in the youth justice sector and probation service. Of course I said yes." For someone who talks of having "a profound and personal interest in counter terrorism" there was never any question of whether he would be prepared to step back into public life.

Ian's work led to transformational change in the way the UK manages ideologically inspired offenders. In the years since he has worked to assist governments across the world to combat violent extremism in their prison systems and other criminal justice reforms in post-authoritarian states.

He has been a senior advisor for the Counter Extremism Project since 2018.



**Punk musician and music writer John Robb has many claims to fame. He coined the phrase Britpop and was the first person to interview the band Nirvana. He's a TV presenter and producer and his music books, including 2023 release *The Art Of Darkness - The History Of Goth*, have been critically acclaimed.**

But what many people perhaps don't know about the Membranes and Goldblade frontman is that he was a Staffordshire University student.

John, from Blackpool, arrived at the Stafford campus in 1980 to study Geography with Statistics.

"I only ever went to one lecture," said John. "I had no interest in going

to college because I was in a band. It was my sister who applied to lots of colleges on my behalf and I got into Staffs."

John has travelled the world having adventures with his music and interviewed the sorts of global superstars most people could only dream of meeting, but his Staffordshire University memories are still very clear.

"I used to hitch home every week because I had no money. I'd heard of Stafford before but never been to the town and then when I arrived I thought 'is this it?'"

"We used to love going to Stoke though. The Stoke campus was great and I used to drink scrumpy in the bar there."

John's band at the time, Discharge, played in Stafford and he says he saw 'a lot of great gigs' in the county town. It was years after he left the University before he played a gig at the Stoke campus.

"I have lots of really good memories of Staffordshire University and I did have a great time there."

John is still in touch with some of his uni friends including fellow Stafford campus student Paul Hemmings, who went on to be guitarist with band The La's.

John's band The Membranes has

evolved over the years from DIY punk to staging sell-out shows with scientists from the Higgs Boson project where they explained the universe.

He's been a pundit for many varied TV programmes over the years including *The Culture Show* and *Channel Four News*.

His writing has included his own fanzine, *Rox*, and writing and running the music magazine and website *Louder Than War*. He has written for *ZigZag*, *Melody Maker* and newspapers including *The Sunday Times*, *The Observer*, *The Independent* and *The Guardian*.

John's books include a biography of *The Stone Roses*, an oral history of punk, an account of 1980s underground music, an oral history of the Manchester music scene and *Manifesto*, co-written by fellow Staffordshire University alumni and eco energy pioneer Dale Vince.

John has now been made an Honorary Doctor of the University that he dropped out of before completing his studies.

He said: "As soon as I opened the letter my first thought was that my mum would think it was really funny that I was finally going to get a degree 42 years after the start of my course. It's almost like a world record."



**John Tearle grew up playing computer games and always wanted to pursue a career in creative technologies. He has not only achieved that dream for himself, he is now able to help make it a reality for others too.**

It was not until John went back into education as a mature student in 2007, to study Computer Games Design at the University of Wolverhampton, that an opportunity to move into games full-time arose.

He had dipped his toe into the games world with a part-time contract with the video game developer Codemasters in 2004, but it was his university years that proved the most formative for the career to come.

"Whilst at University I had the privilege to meet a number of very talented indie-developers, two of whom later became business partners at Flix Interactive," said John.

"The core studio team formed at the start of the recession in 2008, built around a project that my co-founder and I developed outside of studies.

"It was ambitious in scope beyond

our means, but with the industry maturing toward freely accessible toolsets and with few job options due to the economic climate, we made every effort to exploit the opportunity and turned the project team into a sustainable business."

Flix Interactive was officially founded in 2012 with ambitious goals to support the best graduates into industry and to craft the highest quality content.

Since then the studio has won multiple awards, grown to support 150 developers and works on BAFTA-award-winning games.

John has built an enduring relationship with Staffordshire University over the years including helping to support Games students with their career progression.



**Name any successful singer or band from the past 60 years and the chances are that Mike Lloyd OBE will know them, have worked with them or have an anecdote to share.**

A music promoter, record shop owner and concert organiser, Mike has lived and breathed the Staffordshire music scene for decades.

He was awarded an OBE in the 2022 New Year's Honours list for his services to classical music and his role as chief executive of Stoke-on-Trent Classics, which organises orchestral concerts.

But for many people he is best known for the chain of eponymous music shops that became an intrinsic part of the county's musical culture.

Born and raised in Walsall, rock

and roll was just beginning when Mike was growing up.

"I wanted to be a rock star," he said. "That's all I wanted to do. I went to the local grammar school but I did no work for my O levels. All I wanted to do was play my guitar."

He started work as an apprentice at an engineering factory at the age of 16. At a Christmas dance in 1959 he overheard a conversation about a band needing a rhythm guitarist – by the New Year's Eve he'd played his first gig for that band and earned 16 shillings.

By the age of 20 he was offered the chance to turn professional so that his band could tour with a Tamla group.

Years of touring and playing professionally followed before Mike took a job with an entertainment agency working largely in Stoke-on-Trent.

Eric Clapton, Elton John, ACDC, ABBA, The Rolling Stones – there are very few popular music artists that Mike hasn't worked with in one way or another.

He remembers 2,000 tartan-wearing teenage girls waiting outside the Victoria Hall in Hanley to catch a glimpse of the Bay City Rollers.

On another occasion he booked ZZ Top to perform in a cattle shed that still smelt like a cattle shed.

Then there was the time he promoted a Rolling Stones concert at a swimming pool.

In 1971 Mike and his then business partner Terry Blood opened their first music shop in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent. Within three years they had a chain of seven shops.

Mike has juggled various commercial interests over the years, with a common thread of great music running through everything he does.

He has long since reached the age where he no longer needs to work, but has no intention of stopping.

"I'm still doing it because I love it," he said. "I cannot tell you the kick I get out of it when I stand at the back of a concert that I've been involved with.

"There are times when I'd still like to be up there myself. It's such an adrenalin rush. It doesn't matter about the size of the gig. It doesn't matter if it's a small show for 300 or a 10,000 capacity."

On being made an Honorary Doctor of Staffordshire University, Mike says he feels he's been given an honour for doing what he loves doing.

"I was staggered and couldn't believe it," he said. "I had been awarded an OBE at the Christmas and then a letter from Staffordshire University arrived out of the blue the following week.

"It was a fantastic feeling. I felt proud and very humble at the same time."



**Staffordshire University law alumni Zulkifl Ahmed was awarded an MBE for services to Education and to Young People in the Queen's New Year's Honours at the end of 2021.**

Among his many achievements, Zulkifl expertly led Sandwell's Statutory Special Educational Needs and Disability Services through the period of a Written Statement of Action to an exceptional 100 per cent resolution of serious weaknesses in just two years.

Zulkifl, who graduated in 2010,

now works as a Special Educational Needs and Disability Group Manager for Worcestershire County Council and is playing a significant part in their improvement programme as they make good progress in addressing their WSoA targets.

Following his appointment, there was a 61.7% reduction in complaints from parents and a 41% improvement in producing EHC plans in 20 weeks. In March 2020, data showed the delivery of 100% of plans within the 20-week deadline.



**An Academy Award-winning actress who campaigns on behalf of the deaf community, Rachel Shenton has never lost sight of her Staffordshire roots.**

Born and raised in North Staffordshire, Rachel studied performing arts at Stoke-on-Trent College and combined her studies with volunteering for the charity dDeaflinks.

When Rachel was just 12 years old her father became deaf after undergoing chemotherapy treatment

for cancer. She went on to learn British Sign Language, in 2011 she was made ambassador for the National Deaf Children's Society and she continues to raise awareness of deafness in the UK.

Her acting career began with small recurring parts in various television series such as *Holby City* and *Waterloo Road*.

Then in 2010 she was cast in *Hollyoaks* as Mitzeee Minniver, an aspiring glamour model. It was to be her breakthrough role in the UK.

In April 2014 Rachel made her US television debut in season three of *Switched at Birth*, playing Lilly Summers. She went on to shoot seasons four and five.

That same year Rachel appeared in *The Silent Child*, a film she created and co-produced with partner Chris Overton. The film was based on her own experiences as the child of a parent who became deaf. The film features profoundly deaf six-year-old first-time actor Maisie Sly as the titular child. British Sign Language is used in the film. The film won best short film

at the Rhode Island International Film Festival in August 2017. This made it eligible for entry to the Oscars.

In December 2017 the film was selected as one of the final 10 films in the Live Action Short Film category for the Academy Awards. On 23 January 2018 it was announced that *The Silent Child* was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film, which it then won. Rachel kept a promise that she had made to their young lead actress and signed her acceptance speech.

In September 2020, Rachel began appearing in the Channel 5 and PBS adaptation of *All Creatures Great and Small* as Helen Alderson.

Rachel established the Midlands Screen Acting School, fulfilling a role that she felt was lacking regionally at the beginning of her career. The masterclasses are held in *The Catalyst* at Staffordshire University.

Rachel's forthcoming audio drama *Gladstone Girls*, was recorded in the sound studios at Staffordshire University.



**The last commanding officer of The Staffordshire Regiment, Colonel Tim Sandiford OBE's 30-year military career included an operational deployment in Basra for which he was awarded his OBE.**

Born in Burslem into an Army family, his childhood was spent throughout the UK and Germany, returning to school in Staffordshire.

His association with the

Staffordshire Regiment began at Denstone College in 1977 when he joined the STAFFORDS capbadged CCF. He studied for a BA in Geography and English at St Martin's College in Lancaster before joining the Army in 1984 and commissioning into the Staffordshire Regiment (The Prince of Wales's) in 1985.

He served with 1 STAFFORDS in the UK, Germany, Northern Ireland, Canada and Saudi Arabia, deploying with them as the Anti-Tank Platoon commander during the first Gulf War from 1991 to 1992. He then worked in Zimbabwe, at the MOD, Canada, on operations with HQ MND(SE) in Iraq and HQ Allied Rapid Reaction Corps before he returned to 1 STAFFORDS as the Commanding Officer in 2005.

Tim attended the Army Staff College and studied for a MA in Military Studies before completing an MBA with the Open University.

During his tenure as Commanding Officer of 1 STAFFORDS, the battalion trained in Canada, was presented

with new Colours in Lichfield and deployed on operations to Basra in 2006. This challenging tour, coming only 11 months after the last deployment, included a raid against the Serious Crimes Unit in the Al Jameat Police station on Christmas Day, 2006. The battlegroup left Basra widely recognised for their resilience, composure and professionalism having been attacked on a near daily basis and suffering three fatalities and more than 30 injured and wounded during that tour. Tim was awarded the OBE in the Operational Honours list for his leadership during that tour.

He remained in command until the end of November 2007, overseeing the transition from 1 STAFFORDS to 3 MERCIAN (STAFFORDS) under the reorganisation of the Infantry. He served for another 10 years as Commander of the Land Warfare Training Group (UK), Commander British Army Training Unit in Kenya and then in charge of officer selection and the Army's internal consultancy team.



**Noreen Oliver**  
**MBE**

**Noreen Oliver MBE has dedicated decades of her life to rehabilitating literally thousands of people. The Founder and Managing Director of the BAC O'Connor Centre in Staffordshire can truly empathise with those in need of the services her organisation offers as she has had her own personal experience of alcoholism and a subsequent journey into recovery.**

Noreen has extensive experience in the field of addiction and for more than 25 years she has developed a Recovery Community in Staffordshire which has received numerous awards and rehabilitated thousands of individuals and families.

The needs of those she works with

range from active addiction to medical detoxification and from intensive rehabilitation through to independent living and employment.

The BAC O'Connor has services across Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent with 78 beds and employs 144 staff including clinicians, specialist therapists and resettlement staff.

Around half of those staff are in recovery themselves and have gained qualifications from NVQs through to Masters degrees.

In 2006 Noreen was awarded a Tackling Drugs Changing Lives accolade by the Home Office along with The Daily Mirror People's Justice Award. In 2007 she was presented with both the Community Services Award and the Impact Upon Communities Award.

A Lifetime Achievement Award from the Centre for Social Justice which was presented to Noreen by the Rt Hon Sir Iain Duncan Smith MP in 2010 for her commitment to transforming the lives of those dependent on drugs and alcohol. She now sits on the Board of Directors at the Centre for Social Justice.

In 2011 Noreen became the first woman to be named an Honorary Freewoman of the Borough of East Staffordshire and was a torch bearer in the Olympic Relay the following year.

Then in 2013 she became a member of the CVLS Honours Committee and was also awarded the Burton Mail Community Champion Public Service Award in June of that same year.

Alongside the BAC O'Connor Centre Noreen is the founder of the O'Connor Gateway Charitable Trust which offers a gateway to independence, education and employment. Recovery Champions R.I.O.T. (Recovery is Out There) works within the charity and comprises ex-service users who have turned their lives around. They work within schools to educate pupils on the dangers and consequences of substance misuse. They also work in police cells, A&E departments, GP surgeries, prisons and many more places.

Noreen is also the founder and co-chair of national umbrella organisation Recovery Group UK, whose members include rehab providers, academics, clinicians, representatives from young people's services, family organisations and peer-led service user organisations around the country. The Recovery Group UK is one of the largest representative bodies for abstinence treatment, rehabilitation and sustainable recovery.



**Jamie Smith**

**From trading stocks and shares to founding a tech company that works with thousands of clients in more than 25 countries around the globe, Jamie Smith has found success across multiple arenas.**

The common thread that links the varied aspects of his life is the educational institution where he worked, studied for two degrees and has now been made an Honorary Doctor – Staffordshire University.

A vocal supporter of the University over many years, Jamie credits Staffs with transforming his life chances and fuelling his thirst for success.

"It's impossible for me to overestimate how much Staffordshire University has changed my life," he said. "The impact of Staffordshire University runs throughout my life, even down to my personal life because I met my wife here."

Jamie's early life, in Mow Cop in Staffordshire, was tough. His mum was a single parent with a disability and Jamie got his first job at the age

of nine, showing early entrepreneurial flair by subcontracting some of the work to other children.

No one from his family had been to university before and Jamie didn't initially think it would be the right route for him. He took a job at an engineering firm in Stoke-on-Trent but soon knew it wasn't for him.

"I realised that education was going to be my way out of that situation and that I should have stayed in education for longer," he said.

Watching the film Dead Poet's Society gave him the inspiration to take Literary Studies at Staffordshire University.

"I decided I was going to be Robin Williams and inspire kids. I based my future career plans on a film! Once I

was at university I quickly realised that what I was really interested in was people. I didn't really know what I was going to do with that, but I'd built some great relationships."

Jamie stayed on at Staffordshire University after he graduated. He had done some work experience in the accommodation office and was offered an admin role. "I loved it and I loved the people I met at the University," he said.

He was quickly promoted and ended up in the strategic planning office working closely with the then Vice-Chancellor, Christine King.

Alongside his day job Jamie was developing an interest in the internet and technology. He started selling

items on the internet and 'dabbling' on the stock market.

"I'd work at the University and then go home and run my online empire," he said. "I've never looked back. I've been involved with ventures that failed along the way too. Some start-ups didn't take off and others did."

C-Learning is one of Jamie's ventures that did rather more than take off – it went global.

Founded by Jamie in 2011 it is now a Google Premier partner and was the first technology specialist to introduce chromebooks to education in the UK.

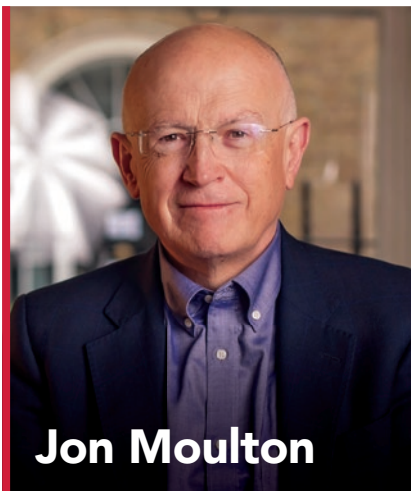
He is the co-founder of Statistics24, a Google Analytics company which supports new

technology start-ups, working with entrepreneurs to develop their businesses.

In 1999 Jamie returned to Staffordshire University as a student once again, to study for an MBA. He says this gave him a growth mindset and skills that he now uses every day.

On being made an Honorary Doctor of Staffordshire University, Jamie said: "This genuinely means more to me than any other thing I've achieved in my professional life. It's something I hold in the highest regard. To be recognised means more than anything else."

He added: "I believe that education is the most powerful force to change the world."



**Jon Moulton**

**One of the UK's most high-profile venture capitalists, Jon Moulton had a humble upbringing in Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent as the son of a pottery worker and a housewife. He proudly recalls that his dad was the last independent master engraver in Cobridge.**

A pupil at Mill Hill then Hanley High School he struggled with his health including surviving TB that went undiagnosed for years and aplastic anaemia that had a 92% fatality rate at that time.

Given his early ill health it is perhaps no coincidence that Jon has gone on to be a trustee of the UK Stem Cell Foundation and has his own medical research charity.

The Jon Moulton Charity Trust was set up in 2018 to continue the work of his previous charity, J P Moulton Charitable Foundation which was established in 2004. The principal aim of the charity is to fund non-commercial clinical trials to make clinical advances and promote the relief of suffering.

The charity has funded more than 150 clinical trials which have been selected based on high quality science with the potential to have a direct benefit to patients. The trials have been conducted in a wide range of therapy areas including respiratory, women's health, oncology, cardiovascular, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, several rare diseases, COPD, paediatrics and the funded trials are usually interventional. The Foundation has also entered into several joint ventures with other medical charities to help support larger trials.

Jon initially studied chemistry and biochemistry at Aberystwyth University, staying for just one term. After a short spell working for a building society in Leek he went to Lancaster University to study chemistry.

Upon graduating he trained in accountancy with Coopers & Lybrand in Liverpool which included a time working in the US which he says was a formative period for him.

After leaving accounting Jon

formed his own business leveraging company buyouts in the US.

He was managing partner of Schroder Ventures from 1985 to 1994, where investments included Parker Pens and Sheffield Forgemasters. He then did a spell at Apax Partners before founding venture capital firm Alchemy in 1997.

Jon set up Better Capital at the end of 2009, making its first investment in February 2010 when it acquired Gardner from Carlyle Group. The fund made nine investments, including a management buyout of the UK arm of Reader's Digest in a £13 million deal with the company's administrator, Moore Stephens, and purchased the luxury motor yacht manufacturer Fairline Boats at a cost of approximately £35 million. Better Capital raised a second fund in 2012 which made six investments: City Link, Everest, iNTERtain, Jaeger, Northern Aerospace and SPOT.

Jon is an active private investor and a director of numerous public and private companies. He is currently Chairman of finnCap, The International Stock Exchange and Anti-Microbial Research Limited. Jon is a member of the Board of the Corporate Finance Faculty of the Institute of Chartered Accountants and is a director of the think tank The Centre for Policy Studies.



# AWARD-WINNING STUDENTS

From superyacht design to film making, meet some of the Staffordshire University students who have won awards for their creativity

Talented students from Staffordshire University have won a series of industry awards for their creative projects.

They include Industrial Design student Ollie Rommelrath, who was crowned the 2023 winner of the Superyacht UK Young Designer. He spent almost 14 hours sketching out his ideas after being set a challenge to design a luxury craft.

The competition took place at the Southampton International Boat Show. After being revealed as the winner, 23-year-old Ollie said: "This is fantastic. I really didn't expect it. This is my first time doing a superyacht design and winning feels like a great achievement."

His prize included an internship with a company specialising in yachts.

Despite Staffordshire's landlocked location, it marked the fourth year in a row that one of the University's designers has triumphed in the superyacht competition. Ollie and his course mates Jonathan Stock, Sebastian Horbacz and Taylor McGraw made up half of 2023's finalists.

Staffordshire University filmmakers have also scooped two accolades at the Royal Television Society's Midlands Student Awards.

Film Production graduate Anya Szelewska picked up the coveted 'Best Drama' category for



**"INDUSTRIAL DESIGN STUDENT OLLIE ROMMELRATH WAS CROWNED THE 2023 WINNER OF THE SUPERYACHT UK YOUNG DESIGNER. HE SPENT ALMOST 14 HOURS SKETCHING OUT HIS IDEAS AFTER BEING SET A CHALLENGE TO DESIGN A LUXURY CRAFT."**

Ollie Rommelrath, winner of the Superyacht UK Young Designer competition

The Birds Nest. The short film chronicled the trials and tribulations of family life through a bird's eye view of their dinner table.

The panel of industry judges included Sir Lenny Henry, who described Anya's film as "very stylish" and "very moving". Anya said: "I was completely overwhelmed to have won. It felt so surreal, and I am just thankful to everyone who was involved in every stage of the film.

"I wanted it to evoke possible feelings, something that could relate to a vast audience and make people smile. A dining room table holds so much significance to a family and I loved creating a film that highlighted that."

Three final-year students from Staffordshire University were also celebrating after winning the 'Craft Skills – Best Sound' award at the RTS event held in May (2023). Oscar Bell, Darcy Wooton-Davis and Cameron Tura were recognised for their film Big Boys Don't Cry, which explores body image and mental health.

Oscar, who wrote and directed the movie, said: "We really wanted to push ourselves and focus on a personal topic. We each had shared experiences of mental health and knew this was something we wanted to communicate."

He and his fellow filmmakers were delighted to win. "We hope that the award encourages people to see the film and gives more exposure to the subject," added Oscar.

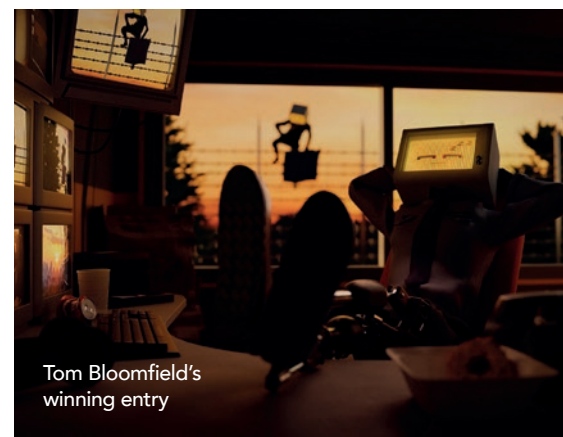
"It was a great day and encouraging to see how inclusive and supportive the industry can be. It makes leaving university less daunting."

In September, a trio of CGI and Visual Effects students also wowed judges at the Domeble Symetri Student Awards. The annual contest involves college and university students from 3D design, CGI, computer-aided design and photography courses around the world.

Tom Bloomfield won Gold for 'Best Full CG Scene'. He created a detailed

design of a robot security guard falling asleep at its desk while an intruder breaks in. The 20-year-old said: "It was fun and very rewarding to have my artwork win the award."

Charlie Gibbs gained Silver in the same category and Toru Kearton was awarded a Merit for 'Best 3D/CAD Design in a Backplate Scene'. And there were further celebrations as Staffordshire University lifted the 'Best University/College' award.



Tom Bloomfield's winning entry

# DESIGNING FOR THE FUTURE

Showcasing work to industry professionals is invaluable for creative students, which is why Staffordshire University's Horizon Fund has helped them to do exactly that.

Graduating Staffordshire University students were able to share their work at an annual showcase of the UK's most innovative emerging design talent.

Many of those who exhibited at New Designers, staged at The Business Design Centre in London, were only able to do so thanks to opportunities awards from Staffordshire University's Horizon Fund.

Work displayed included screen-printed fabric, printed wallpaper, rugs, picture books, stationery and giftware designs created using digital and analogue processes.

Aspiring interior designer Harrison Haytree said: "Without the Horizon Fund I don't think I would have been able to come to New Designers because of the cost of it. Thanks to the Horizon Fund I have been able to be here and to get a work placement with Sanderson as a result of that. It's a really good placement too.

"I was in disbelief when they came over and said they really liked my work. Then they gave me the little card which I thought was a nice memento to have and then a three-month placement within the exact company that I wanted. I've done it. I've succeeded."

Harrison created a modern interpretation of neoclassical

design using hand screen printing and laser cutting.

He said: "I used facilities such as the print room and laser cutting to create the tools that I needed to print my designs."

Fellow Staffordshire University BA (Hons) Surface Pattern and Textile Design student Becky Brentnall scooped the 'AVA CAD/CAM One to Watch' award at New Designers.

She was also recognised by Prestigious Textiles, earning a coveted 'PT loves' tag, giving her more opportunity to freelance and sell her designs.

Becky said: "Part of my learning process through my course has been accepting myself as a creative, accepting how I work and being comfortable with that because I was very much a perfectionist and the tutors at Staffs have really pushed me.

"I think they could see that I love that mark making, the experimentation, just you know, how excited I got by pushing me out of my comfort zone and to just push forward and to not know what I'm going to end up with.

"They told me I'd get there, just keep going. The course has really let me just achieve that."

# MEET THE NEW DESIGNERS

## STEPHANIE McCLAREN BA (HONS) SURFACE PATTERN AND TEXTILE DESIGN

### What project did you choose to showcase at New Designers and why?

I chose to take my children's picture book, Ellie and Sally's Adventures, which I wrote and illustrated. I also took fabric samples that I designed to go onto a range of back to school products to promote the book.

### How was the event? Did you enjoy yourself?

Attending the event took me out of my comfort zone, but I needed the experience of promoting the book and talking to strangers about it. The experience gave me the confidence to do that. It was an emotional experience.

### What advice would you give to someone starting your course?

The Surface Pattern and Textile Design course offers a wide variation of possibilities. I began the course without a definite direction. I let the course show me what was possible. This course is a place to grow as a creative. I think myself lucky to have been among a group of creatives who were so supportive.



## CHLOE POWELL BA (HONS) GRAPHIC DESIGN

### You showcased your work at the New Blood Festival. What project did you choose and why?

I showcased my final two projects of the course. It was in a big portfolio for guests to flip through. This was a branding project I did for a concept greetings card company and a handmade fabric banner I made inspired by the suffragettes. I chose these because, career wise, I am most interested in branding and social advocacy campaign design. I wanted this to be reflective in the work I chose so potential employers could see I had an interest for it.

### How was the event? Did you enjoy yourself?

The event was amazing. It was so lovely to see all of my cohort's work up and having guests take interest in it. It was also really interesting to see work from other universities and see what projects were included in their courses.

### What did you hope to get out of attending? Did you achieve what you wanted?

I hoped to have my work seen by new eyes and potential employers. Our booth at the event got a lot of traffic and there were lots of photographs being taken of all of our work and specifically our name cards so getting my work out their was definitely achieved. As well as employability talks happening throughout the day too.

### What advice would you give to someone starting your course?

Take any opportunity given to you. Don't think that you won't need it or it might not add anything to your experience on your course because it absolutely will. It will also make you closer with your cohort which is something that one day you might miss so make sure you're taking full advantage of the opportunities you can take together.

## REBECCA JOHNSON PUDNEY

### BA (HONS) GRAPHIC DESIGN

#### **You attended the New Blood Festival. What project did you choose to showcase and why?**

I chose to showcase my two final year projects. These were both branding and showed off strong typographical skills - which is something I want to be a key part of my future career. The first project I showed was called Temperance and it is a non-alcoholic wine utilising an infographic on the label. I chose this as it showed a different approach to wine branding and I got a lot of compliments!

The second project is called Big Night In, a fakeaway cooking box which supplied consumers with takeaway recipes they can cook at home. The work is vibrant and I developed a new type style that I was really pleased with. A lot of people complimented this too.

#### **How was the event? Did you enjoy yourself?**

The event was very enjoyable - not only did we get to display our work but we could familiarise ourselves with other university work. Seeing so many creatives in one room was

a great feeling and you could feel everyone supporting one another. It was also great seeing so many creative employers viewing the work - some of which have messaged me. It was a really great feeling knowing others liked my work if they got in further contact.

#### **What did you hope to get out of attending?**

##### **Did you achieve what you wanted?**

I hoped to get some internship offers that could lead to something more. That definitely happened - around eight individuals contacted me and I have stayed in touch with these until I finish my current internship with VCCP.

##### **What advice would you give to someone starting your course?**

Creative directors want to see big scary ideas! I've heard from people in agencies that some of the work felt safe at the festival - they want to see the 'wrong answers'. But still make your work beautiful and well crafted, that goes a long way!

---

## CALLUM JONES

### BA (HONS) INDUSTRIAL DESIGN; PRODUCT & TRANSPORT

#### **What project did you choose to showcase at New Designers and why?**

I chose to display my final year project, a domestic air conditioner for the UK market. This is because it is my most developed and highest-level work.

#### **How was the event? Did you enjoy yourself?**

New Designers was great, I had a brilliant time. There are many memories from the event, but I enjoyed being able to blow off steam in the evening after the show with the lecturers and fellow students.

#### **What did you hope to get out of attending?**

##### **Did you achieve what you wanted?**

I was able to make some connections in the industry which was my main aim during the show. Some of the interest was from high profile companies which was extremely validating.

##### **What advice would you give to someone starting your course?**

Get in the mindset of constantly ideating. This allows for a really solid foundation for a project.



## REBECCA BRENTNALL

### BA (HONS) SURFACE PATTERN AND TEXTILE DESIGN

#### What project did you choose to showcase at New Designers and why?

I exhibited most of my final degree project which I'd previously exhibited at the degree show. There wasn't quite as much space available so I had to edit it slightly but what I didn't have room for, I was able to still take and show within my portfolio stand area. This is something that many of the other universities didn't have on their stands yet I received so much positive feedback on the fact that visitors to the show were able to view my portfolio and showcase the breadth of learning and experience I'd achieved through my course. I chose this project as it's the work I'm most proud of and the best that I produced whilst at University.

#### How was the event? Did you enjoy yourself?

I loved the show. It was exhilarating and exciting. I loved sharing my ideas, work and processes with like-minded creatives in industry as well as other recent graduates and

students considering their future careers. My favourite memories were receiving two awards.

#### What did you hope to get out of attending? Did you achieve what you wanted?

I made a lot of contacts and received much positive feedback from agents and design companies. I also made use of the portfolio sessions and talks where I gained valuable knowledge.

#### What advice would you give to someone starting your course?

Be brave, take risks, learn from your mistakes. Don't take your work too seriously and have some fun with it. Now's the time to experiment and do exactly what you want with your creativity. Explore all avenues and processes. You never know what you might discover enjoying.

## EMILIA POP (KOVACS)

### BA (HONS) SURFACE PATTERN AND TEXTILE DESIGN (WITH A FOUNDATION YEAR)

#### What project did you choose to showcase at New Designers and why?

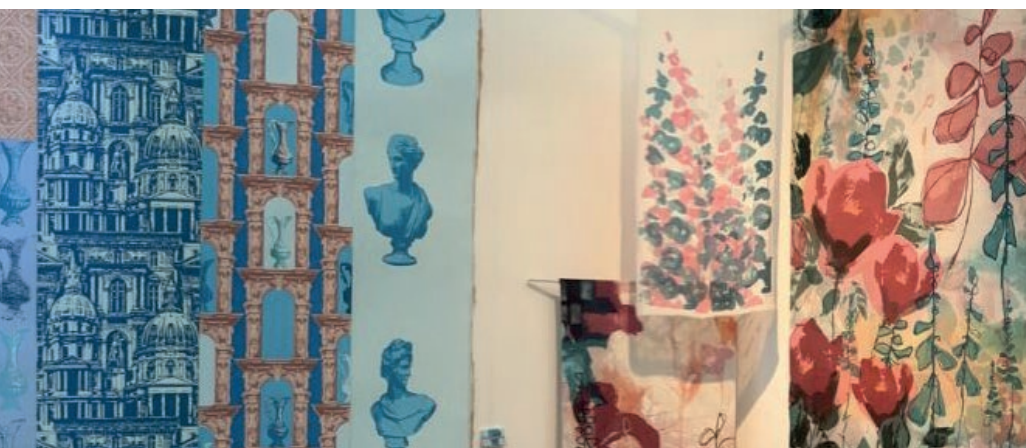
I choose to exhibit my final year project, a dreamy nursery collection for kids' interiors.

#### How was the event? Did you enjoy yourself?

I enjoyed attending to New Designers and it was such a fun and inspiring experience. I had a few recognitions from big companies like M&S, Sanderson, UkGreetings and Ashley Wild.

#### What did you hope to get out of attending? Did you achieve what you wanted?

If I can recommend any advice for people who would like to attend New Designers, I would say do it! You never know where the opportunities can come, who you meet but also you get a chance to present your work, portfolio and get recognition and feedback on your work.



# Raising Funds, Widening Horizons

**Staffordshire University's Horizon Fund can unlock life-changing opportunities for students. We found out more about this long-term campaign**

The Horizon Fund was launched at Staffordshire University in 2013, bringing together our University family of alumni, supporters, staff and students to fund life changing opportunity awards, bursaries and scholarships. As a result more than 2,000 students have so far received awards ranging in value from £20 to £2,000!

Students often see finance, particularly travel and living costs, as a huge barrier to higher education. It is thanks to the Horizon Fund's generous donors that many of these students are now able to access financial support.

However, development funds are not just targeted to those from lower income households. Equally important is the funding of opportunity awards for students from all backgrounds to extend their learning, seize new opportunities and achieve their ambitions.



If you would like to donate to the Horizon Fund by making a regular monthly donation or giving a one-off amount then it couldn't be easier. Simply visit [giving.staffs.ac.uk](https://giving.staffs.ac.uk)





**Martin Tideswell, Staffordshire University's Director of Communities and Commercial Engagement, led a team of University colleagues on an epic quest to play tabletop roleplaying games for 24 hours to raise money for the Horizon Fund.**

They used the University's Virtual Production Studio for their games of Dungeons and Dragons and Cthulhu, to the backdrop of artwork created by virtual production staff.

Martin said: "We were grateful to everyone who donated for helping to keep up the energy and excitement through 24 hours without sleep. The donations will make a huge difference to our students."



**Professor Martin Jones, the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Staffordshire University, took part in a sponsored cycling challenge to raise money for the Horizon Fund.**

Professor Jones, who raced competitively for many years, led from the front by cycling 42 miles from Dore in Sheffield to Staffordshire University's campus in Leek Road, Stoke-on-Trent.

He was chased in the car by his wife, Victoria, and son, Jocelin, who gave him a three-hour head start, trying to catch him before he arrived at Leek Road.

He said: "I wanted to personally contribute to the Horizon Fund as we look to extend and expand the support we offer to our amazing students here at Staffordshire University."

## YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



**Giving money isn't the only way you can help the Horizon Fund and support future graduates – you could also create opportunities or give the gift of your time.**

Perhaps you could give a student talk or guest lecture about your industry or career journey. You could share your top tips in a vlog or video or get involved in the GradEx event.

Could your business or organisation offer a work placement, internship or other employment opportunity? Perhaps you could offer a scholarship, sponsorship or

opportunity funds to inspire others.

Maybe you could set a live brief for students to meet such as a research project, logo design, an event to plan or a business problem to solve. The only limit to the possibilities is your imagination.

Staffordshire University's Development and Alumni Relations Team would love to hear from people who would like to support current students. Call **01782 294942** or email **developmentoffice@staffs.ac.uk**

# STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY

# NEWS

## STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY REVEALS PLANS FOR NEW STUDENT VILLAGE

Staffordshire University has recently shared plans for a new multi-million pound student village on its main Stoke-on-Trent campus.



**The proposals involve the demolition of existing student accommodation on its Leek Road site which will become accessible parkland.**

The planned Student Village will be built on the opposite side of the River Trent, next to the nature reserve and close to the existing Clarice Cliff Court Halls of Residence and the Woodlands Day Nursery and Forest School.

This will involve construction of more than 700 new student rooms in a mix of cluster blocks and townhouses, plus the refurbishment of the Clarice Cliff Court accommodation which currently houses just under 300 students. A village 'hub' facility is also proposed as part of the development.

A new pedestrian bridge and boardwalk would link the new accommodation and hub with the University's wider Leek Road site. As part of the plans, a new car parking area would be created on the former Squires View site to the east of the University's campus.

Subject to the necessary planning permissions, construction of the Student Village would commence in 2024 with an estimated completion date of 2026.

Professor Martin Jones, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive at Staffordshire University, said: "We are very excited to submit these plans to Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

"The proposed Staffordshire University Student Village is an exciting opportunity to create a vibrant student community offering new ways of living and studying on campus by blending contemporary sustainable architecture with high quality facilities."

Sally McGill, Chief Financial Officer and Executive Lead for Sustainability at Staffordshire University, added: "This development has the potential to revitalise our campus not only by providing an excellent environment for our students, in a unique natural setting, but also by creating a new green heart to the Leek Road site.



## STUDENT FASHION DESIGNERS MAKE A STATEMENT AT GRADUATE FASHION WEEK

### BA (Hons) Fashion students from Staffordshire University took their creations to the catwalk at Graduate Fashion Week 2023.

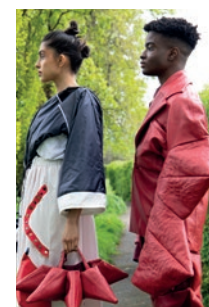
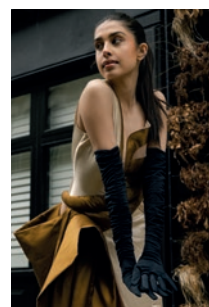
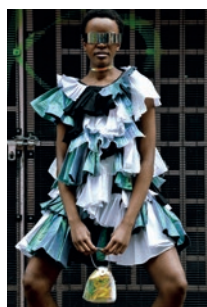
The annual event is the largest showcase of graduate fashion talent in the world. It attracts 20,000 guests, features 17 catwalk shows, university and brand exhibition stands, alongside a packed schedule of talks, masterclasses and workshops from leading names in the fashion and retail industry.

Awards – judged by a panel of industry experts – are also presented to the best portfolios and projects.

Final year student Diana Kibangou Obondji scooped Burberry's 'Culture and Heritage Design Award', for her fashion collection TENE TI ZOH which draws on her experiences of growing up in Congo and now living in the UK.

"I felt really emotional when my name was called out. Especially because of what the collection means to me. Culture and heritage to me is everything and I try to incorporate it in all that I do so being recognised by big industry names, like Burberry who have been such a successful brand remaining true to their heritage, is just incredible," Diana commented.

"I am feeling really grateful in this moment and thankful to everyone that pushed me into doing my best. Especially the team at University which supported me so much, with my project and collection and just pushed me to achieve my potential."



## STAFFS RACING TEAM CLAIM VICTORY AT SILVERSTONE

### Students from Staffordshire University have beaten racing teams from around the world to claim second place in Formula Student 2023.

The annual tournament challenges students to design, build, test, and race a small-scale formula-style racing car. Over five days, more than 140 teams competed in trials at the famous Silverstone Circuit. Staffordshire University was the best performing UK team after finishing second overall to an Italian team from the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia.

BEng (Hons) Automotive and Motorsport Engineering student Joseph Grimer led the team to victory after first joining Formula Student four years ago.

He has now secured a graduate job with Mercedes Formula 1, where he completed a placement year during his studies.

Joseph said: "Automotive and Motorsport Engineering is exactly what you want to study to go into the top level of motorsport."

## MINISTER VISITS STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY TO SPEAK WITH DEGREE APPRENTICES

### Staffordshire University showcased its degree apprenticeship provision to the Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education.

The round table discussion with the University's senior leaders and degree apprentices took place in April at the request of the Minister.

He met with a range of degree apprentices including Staffordshire Nurse Apprentice Annette Walklate who became a registered nurse in critical care at Royal Stoke University Hospital after completing a degree apprenticeship at the age of 58.

The Government has confirmed an additional £40m investment in a bid to increase the uptake of degree apprenticeships and the Minister was keen to hear what motivated Staffordshire's degree apprentices to choose the "earn while you learn" pathway and how the government could encourage more people to follow in their footsteps.

Addressing the degree apprentices, the Minister said: "I want to have a country where there are millions of you."

Commenting on the visit, Vice-Chancellor Professor Martin Jones, said "It was an honour and a privilege to have the Minister visit our campus. As one of the largest degree apprenticeship providers in the country we have recently been allocated £414k to grow our provision even further and we are delighted that the Minister wanted to hear first-hand from our degree apprentices about their experiences."

Staffordshire University also hosted the first International Conference on Delivery and Policy of Degree and Higher Apprenticeship at the University this year hosted by Pro Vice-Chancellor Raheel Nawaz.

The conference was the first inclusive gathering of key players involved in advancing degree and higher apprenticeships from the UK and overseas. Although Minister Halfon wasn't able to attend in person, he sent a video message of support to the conference where he spoke of the University's "strong track record" of working with employers to address skills gaps.

## THE ROOKIES RECOGNISE UNIVERSITY AMONG BEST IN THE WORLD

### Staffordshire University's games development department is celebrating being named in the top 10 for Games Design and Development by The Rookies.

In the 2023 annual rankings, the University is recognised 7th in the world for Games Design and Development and is 23rd in the world's top 50 Creative Schools – the best ranked UK University!

Head of games development, Professor Chris Headleand, said "These are huge badges of honour for the University which this year is celebrating 20 years of games. We pride ourselves on developing graduates with the knowledge skills and behaviours that our industry needs and are absolutely thrilled to be recognised in this way."

The rankings follow hot on the heels of Staffordshire University's recognition as a Rookies Certified School - one of only seven in the UK. Earlier this year Aaron Burnhope was named winner of the Game Development category at the Rookie Awards 2023 for his final year project. Aaron is now working for world renowned studio, Rebellion Games.

The Rookies co-founder Andrew McDonald said: "Staffordshire University has left us naturally impressed with their experienced staff, vital industry connections, and positive student feedback. As a Rookies Certified School, they epitomise what it means to prepare artists for success in the creative industries, equipping students with the essential skills they need to excel."



3

VOICES

STAFFORDSHIRE  
UNIVERSITY IS  
INCREDIBLY  
PROUD  
OF ITS ALUMNI.

THREE  
GRADUATES  
FROM A VARIETY  
OF SECTORS  
TALK ABOUT LIFE  
POST-UNIVERSITY.



## 1 / NATHAN



Professional boxer Nathan 'Hitman' Heaney is nothing short of an inspiration. The Staffordshire University Sports Development and Coaching alum turned professional at a stage in his career when many athletes would be contemplating retirement. A middleweight, he is represented by Frank Warren and his fights in front of tens of thousands of spectators are often televised.

### Who is your inspiration?

My dad was my first hero really. He was an amateur boxer and he was basically my inspiration in terms of getting into the sport. I think I was nine years old when I first started boxing.

### Your professional boxing career started relatively late. Why?

In terms of doing well my career started late. I boxed from age nine and competed from age 11. I did that until I was aged 26. If you don't win the ABA Championships you're probably not going to get signed by Frank Warren or whoever the big promoter is at the time. I'd seen a lot of fighters in the area not win professional titles and go on what's called the small haul scene, boxing in town halls, leisure centres and so on. It's based on how many tickets you can sell. If you can't sell tickets you're not going to fight and you're not going to have a career. I boxed for 16 years, had 90 fights and on my 90th fight it was the Staffordshire ABA final. I lost and I thought I was done. I'd given everything to the sport, I'd just got a teaching placement at Stafford College, my first daughter had been born and I thought I was never going to box ever again. But about a year later I thought if I don't try I'm going to regret this. I was 27, I told my now wife to give me three years and if I hadn't got there I promised to never box again. Two and a half years in I got signed by Frank Warren.

### Your fights are often televised. How does that feel?

It's very, very weird. My last fight I fought in front of 14,000 people at the Manchester Arena and all I can really remember looking back on it is my opponent. You don't see the crowd and in fact you don't even see the cameras. It's only post-fight, when you watch the fight back, that you see there was a cameraman right in front of you.

I can never remember that at all because I'm that focused.

### What's your life like when you're preparing for a fight?

Other than a few media interviews there's not a lot of difference because now I'm boxing professionally I'm training full-time. I'm regimented about training in the morning and training in the evening.

### What does a professional boxer eat?

Last night I had a massive curry and eight poppadoms. If I train for three hours a day I can get away with eating whatever I want. If anything I don't eat enough food because it just drops off me when I'm training. The only thing I don't do is drink alcohol for at least six weeks before a fight.

### Did your degree give you a grounding for the career you have today?

College and University are probably the best things that have ever happened to me. When I was younger I wanted to do well at boxing because I wanted to make a living as a professional athlete. I didn't want to be working in a cash and carry – I hated every minute of doing that. University gave me a career as a teacher and that gave me stability. When I went back into boxing it wasn't because I needed it to be financially successful as I already had a career.

### What's your dream?

The ultimate dream for me is to fight at Stoke City's football stadium. No matter what happens I'd be a happy man then. I'd have achieved everything and more than I could have ever dreamt of.

### What advice would you give to someone who's at a crossroads in life?

I'm a 23-year overnight success, but I was very consistent and persistent. You've got to set little goals here and there.

## 2/AMANDA

PR and marketing consultant Amanda Danells-Bewley began her career working on conference and video production and on product launches and promotional videos for companies such as Goodyear and Steelite. She now specialises in working with the charity and not-for-profit sector including for The Royal British Legion and St John Ambulance. A trained garden designer, Amanda has exhibited at the Chelsea Flower Show and won an RHS Silver Medal at Gardeners' World Live. The Staffordshire University Operational Leadership and Management alumni is a Trustee of The Dyspraxia Foundation, champions neurodiversity and sees her own dyslexia as an opportunity rather than an obstacle.

**Your dyslexia hasn't held you back from a career working with words. Tell us about that.**

It's partly down to my mum. She worked in marketing and I just knew that was possible. A lot of the time a PR person is presenting a story and making that story interesting. It's a very different skill from, say, writing an essay or writing a business report. You've got to be really be punchy with it. I just taught myself that and I carried on teaching myself and learning about it. Sometimes it's formulaic and you learn that, and I work with people who proofread my work all the time. Spellcheck is my friend and I use tech to help me.

**Did your time at Staffordshire University help with that journey?**

Coming here and being on that course taught me that my skills are valuable and that what we now call neurodiversity meant I had something different to offer. But yes, it was a struggle. I'm dyslexic and I have dyscalculia as well.

Coming to Staffordshire University was a turning point for me. It was a revelation. It showed me that

I had skills to bring to the team because I'd always been on the outside until that point. For my tutors and lecturers to say I was bringing really vital skills to the team was pivotal in the way I saw myself and what I had to offer an employer.

**Where does being an award-winning garden designer fit into the mix?**

I wanted to do something for myself so I went and did night school. It was a six-week course at Stafford College in how to redesign your garden. I loved it and the teacher told me I was really good at it. So I retrained, invested in myself and did a year-long course. The guy that was running the course was exhibiting at Chelsea Flower Show so I did all the PR and wrote the press packs but I was also, as a student, working on that garden. I went down to London and spent two weeks building a Chelsea Flower Show garden. Then when I graduated I worked as a garden designer. I absolutely loved it.

**You're a mum to six children. How do you manage such an active career alongside family life?**

I have two wonderful step-children and I have four children of my own. I always say I can organise troop manoeuvres. The irony is that as someone who is neurodiverse, time keeping is not always my best thing and being organised is not always my best thing but you learn those skills.

**What advice would you give to people currently at University?**

If you come to University and feel a little bit out of kilter that's always a really good indicator that you might be neurodiverse. It's worth talking to learning support. If you're neurodiverse, talking to new people can be the scariest thing ever, but learning support is here to support you and to support your learning. If you access that it can really be a game changer.



## 3 / BEN

The musician Slash tempted Ben McManus to Staffordshire University but it's his determination to reduce the city's digital divide that's kept him in Stoke-on-Trent. The Fine Art alumni is the co-founder and creative director of Wavemaker Stoke CIC, a digital inclusion and skills hub for hard-to-reach young people and makers in North Staffordshire.

### How did you make the move from studying fine art to the world of work?

When I graduated I started working for Stoke-on-Trent City Council as an arts worker and then an arts officer. My Staffordshire University Fine Art degree meant I could do the murals, I could do the painting, I could run the workshops. A lot of it was baptism of fire. I could draw on the skills I acquired at University like a toolbelt.

### You're now working to reduce Stoke-on-Trent's digital divide. That doesn't sound like a natural progression from art.

It began when I was working at B-Arts. I was heavily involved with a project there called The Bridge Project where we worked with young people seeking asylum and refugees from various different countries and doing computer skills with them. It was incredibly rewarding, massively rewarding. I was very isolated in my life experience and just speaking to some of these young boys from Iran and Iraq made me realise we could all benefit from taking a broader look at everything in the world and where we fit into that. I didn't really know it at the time but it was when the internet was really starting to become more important. I realised that if people didn't have the equipment or the language or the confidence to use the kit then they'd be at a massive disadvantage.

### How did Wavemaker come about?

We were approached by Comic Relief who had the last of the Give It Sum money donated by Robbie Williams and wanted to know what to do with it instead of just dishing out small grants. Then Nominet Trust match funded it. The whole premise was young, disadvantaged people in Stoke-on-Trent and

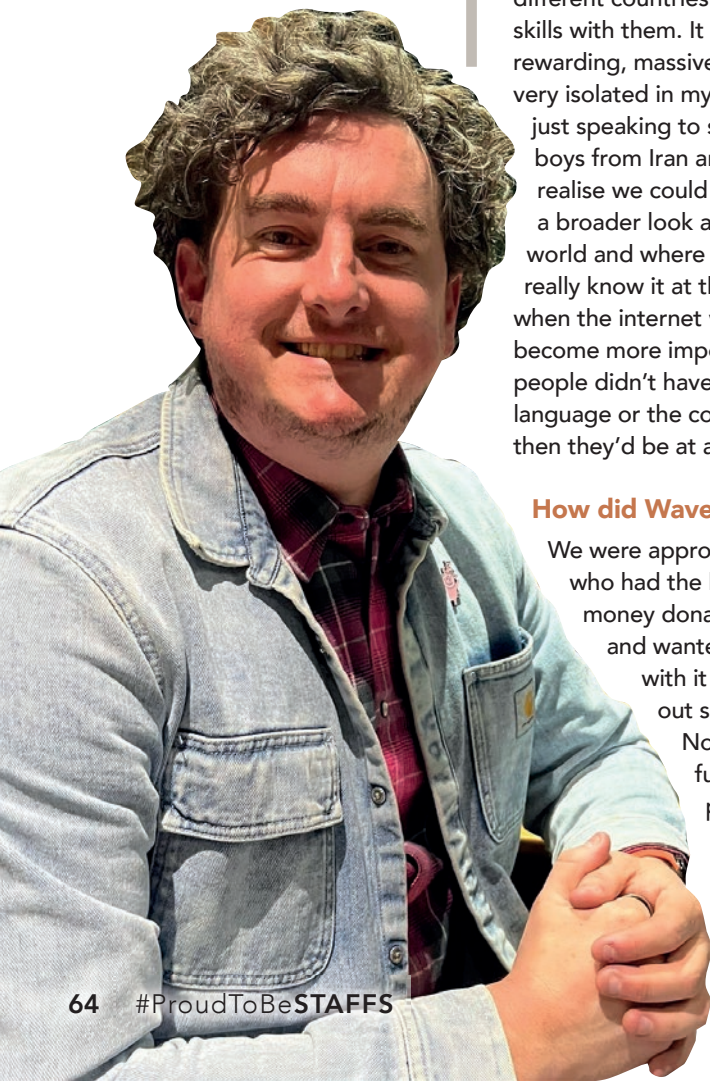
tech. We had a brainstorming session and I suggested the idea of a fab lab or a maker space where young adults could come and get access to equipment that they maybe couldn't at school, or maybe they didn't go to school, and to find a way to get those ideas out of their head and create something. They asked me to do a six-month feasibility study and liked the results – but they wanted me to run the project. I said yes, and that was eight years ago.

### Did the pandemic, and the increased use of digital communication, change the work you needed to do?

Just before the pandemic we'd started to do more work for the NHS, digital training for NHS staff and patients. It was the same field of work but instead of working with young adults to raise their digital confidence we might be working with people with long-term health conditions to raise their digital confidence so they could maybe manage their health better. So we were delivering sessions to practice nurses and doctors face-to-face in hotels in London. I remember we went to London to deliver one of those sessions the week before everything changed due to the pandemic. All of a sudden it happened, we all had to stay in. All those doors we'd been trying to push on to encourage people to use digital more in their practice flew wide open and people needed digital inclusion training and help. We started doing more sessions and they were all remote.

### How has your enduring connection to Staffordshire University fed into your work?

I've seen this University grow, change and expand but I'm aware now more than ever of the impact it has in the wider community and internationally. There'll always be a part of me that's Staffordshire University and there'll be people all over the world that'll feel the same way.



# NEXT GEN EDUCATION



For information on courses or studying at Staffordshire University visit:

[www.staffs.ac.uk/undergraduate](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/undergraduate)

Find us on: [www.staffs.ac.uk/socialmedia](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/socialmedia)





Own your  
future



## POSTGRADUATE STUDY

It's easier than you think to take  
your career to the next level...

**Upto 25% discount off your postgraduate course fees\***  
Find out more at our open events.

Book your place: [www.staffs.ac.uk/visit](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/visit)

\*Terms and conditions apply

# SPORTS STARS, TV PERSONALITIES, ARTISTS, BUSINESS PEOPLE, MUSICIANS AND MORE

---

**Staffordshire University's global alumni and honorary doctor community includes inspirational people from all walks of life.**

From famous faces to hidden treasures, the Proud To Be Staffs podcast brings you an interview with a different alumni or honorary doctor every two weeks. Expect to be uplifted, motivated and, if you're Staffordshire University alumni, for the memories to come flooding back. Every single one of this eclectic group of individuals is Proud To Be Staffs.

Visit [proudtobestaffs.buzzsprout.com](http://proudtobestaffs.buzzsprout.com)



# HORIZON

Staffordshire University  
**2024 ISSUE**

---

Horizon is a Staffordshire  
University publication  
created by University staff  
[www.staffs.ac.uk](http://www.staffs.ac.uk)