

# Plymouth University in the Channel Islands

Professor Ed Sallis reflects on Plymouth University's contribution to graduate education in the islands



A great deal has been said about the benefits of creating a university for the Channel Islands. The need for graduate level skills has never been higher. The percentage of graduates in the islands lags behind that of our competitors. For example, a recent report on skills from the National Audit Office found that 60% of people living in inner London are graduates.

This compares to our 25%. However, establishing a higher institution has never passed the drawing board stage, probably because economies of scale dictate that the islands are too small to support the complex and expensive infrastructure required for an independent university. While these initiatives have been discussed, one university has been quietly and steadfastly developing opportunities for islanders to study for a degree without leaving home.

Last month 65 islanders graduated with Plymouth University degrees having completed their studies on-island. They had been taught at Plymouth's partner, Highlands College, in its University Centre. The graduates studied for a range of foundation and honours degree programmes directly relevant to the local economy including financial services, business and management, information technology and childhood studies. With more than 200 undergraduates studying there, Plymouth has become the premier university provider in the islands and is set to expand its numbers and range of provision in the next five years.

The secret of success has been the high level of support provided to Highlands by the university. Operating successful degree programmes is a specialist and time-consuming business. It is crucial that the standards on-island are the same as those on the main university campus and that local students have a rich and stimulating academic experience. Plymouth is a specialist in academic partnerships, partnering as it does with a wide range of colleges and schools in the southwest of England and providing degrees for the Royal Navy. Academic staff visit regularly and the university operates a rigorous quality assurance regime and ensures parity of standards. As one of the world's leading modern universities it has built its reputation in educating graduates who make a contribution to the economy and culture of their local communities.

The strength of the degree provision provided through the University Centre is the emphasis placed on workplace learning. Students spend some 40% of their programme

working in local companies, which ensures that students gain practical knowledge that helps them relate theory to practice. More than 100 employers partner Highlands in providing work placements. A good example is the partnership with the Fairway Group which, with Bracken Rothwell, its connected chartered accountancy practice, offers paid work placements to a number of financial services undergraduates. For them it is an excellent way of sourcing and recruiting home-grown talent.

Managing director Louise Bracken Smith said: 'By maintaining close links with the college and its degree courses, we can look to employ ambitious, dynamic, self-starters who can apply and embed what they have learnt in the classroom to the office.' The experience enriches the student learning and helps them improve teamwork, communication and business etiquette skills. Scott Conneely, a former Highlands student, who is now employed as a trainee accountant with Bracken Rothwell, found that his work placement fitted well with his studies. 'I assisted the Fairway Trust team with a significant transfer of an United Arab Emirates business and helped the bookkeeping and accounts preparation team, which gave me a valuable insight into their work and really helped with my studies in offshore administration and accountancy,' he said.

Plymouth is looking to extend its provision locally and its latest project aims to enhance its offering by establishing a branch of its alumni society. The university has more than 350 graduates in both islands who have studied in Plymouth or through Highlands. The society aims to keep graduates in touch with the university and with the friends they made while studying.

It helps the university to understand the needs of the economy as they receive feedback on how former students are progressing in their careers. The first meeting was held in October in Jersey and it is intended to hold regular networking meetings in both islands.

Plymouth has more than 100,000 graduates across the world in 100 countries and recently alumni events have been held in Beijing, Hong Kong, Athens and the House of Lords. The establishment of a local alumni society is another example of the value the university adds to the islands.

If Plymouth graduates wish to register to become alumni members they can e-mail [alumni@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@plymouth.ac.uk)