

Chester Alumni
Around the World



University of
Chester

A photograph of a graduation ceremony. In the center, a graduate in a black cap and gown with a blue and white stole is walking away from the camera down a long aisle. Other graduates in similar attire are seated on either side of the aisle. In the background, a large, ornate red structure, possibly a stage or part of a building, is visible. The overall atmosphere is formal and celebratory.

ACH1EVE

Contents

Page 4 University News	Page 20 From Nigeria to Chester
Page 6 Expeditions across the continents	Page 22 Sport and fitness around the world
Page 8 Life after leaving the University of Chester	Page 24 The Alumni Archive
Page 10 Alumni across the world	Page 26 My Chester Story: Assel Bekmagambetova
Page 12 Graduate Outcomes Survey & Careers and Employability Support	Page 28 Reflecting on my journey: Nawmi
Page 14 Navigating the Road to Professional Growth: Insights from Employment	Page 30 Alumni Book Club
Page 16 The visionary power of purpose	Page 32 Internationalisation
Page 18 Chester International Film Festival 2024	Page 34 Team Spotlight: Student Services
	Page 35 One to watch

Contact

The Development and Alumni Relations Office

✉ ACH1EVE@chester.ac.uk
☎ 01244 511 171
🌐 www.chester.ac.uk/alumni

Chester International Film Festival 2024

Page 18

Alumni across the world

Page 10

Contributors



Rob Houghton (1995)

Since leaving Chester, Rob has built a career in the outdoors. He's worked at international schools, led educational expeditions on five continents, written the definitive English language guidebook to mountain biking in Slovenia, and been a ski host during a season in Italy. He loves fondue and is partial to a pinot.



Dr Tanveer Ahmed (2014)

Tanveer Ahmed graduated from the University of Chester in 2014 and holds a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA). Driven by his passion for knowledge, he pursued further studies and obtained his MPhil from the University of Salford, solidifying his expertise in his chosen field. He embarked on his academic journey by completing his PhD from the University of Huddersfield in 2022, where he delved deep into his research interests. Dr Tanveer Ahmed is a dedicated educator and scholar, currently serving as a full-time lecturer at the Scholars School System (Leeds Trinity University).



Danielle Owen (2015)

Born and raised in Ohio, USA, Danielle always had a dream of living in the UK. At 18, she was accepted into the University of Chester, and never looked back. Now nearly 13 years on and a UK citizen, she is thankful for taking that risk that changed her life for the better, forever. She graduated with a BA (Hons) Event Management in 2014 and immediately went onto the brand new course (at the time), MSc Digital Marketing from 2014 to 2015 – the first graduate of this course!



Hilary Berg (2022)

Hil Berg graduated with a work-based MA in PR and Communications for Social Change in 2022, with a research specialism in brand activism. She runs One Planet Communications, a consultancy that helps organisations develop transformational sustainability strategies and campaigns, and has worked on projects all over the world, travelling from her base in Cheshire to wherever work takes her.



Bamikole Abiodun (2023)

Bamikole Abiodun is a Nigerian trailblazer, with a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees with distinctions with the last of them being an MBA from the University of Chester, he founded BGC Consultancy, positioned to drive SME growth in Nigeria and beyond. His academic prowess, selflessness, leadership, skills, and altruistic initiatives have garnered awards, inspiring many through speeches and mentorship. A true catalyst for change.



Sarah Hart (2012)

Sarah graduated from the University of Chester in 2012 with a First-Class honour in Business & Events Management. She went on to work in a number of business, management, and marketing roles, before co-founding her own business - The Movement Blueprint - in 2019. Blending her passion for health and fitness with her business and marketing skills, Sarah has simultaneously pursued her dreams to travel the world through her career.



Assel Bekmagambetova (2023)

Assel graduated from the University of Chester in 2023 with an MA in War, Conflict and Society. During her studies, she was a Chester Cathedral volunteer and after she graduated, she started studying towards the Project Management professional certificate.



Dr Nawmi Nahar Nova (2023)

Nawmi completed her Master's in Diabetes from the University of Chester, graduating in 2023. Following her degree, she successfully passed her licensing exams to practice medicine as a doctor in the UK and obtained her General Medical Council (GMC) registration in 2024. Nawmi is currently serving as a Clinical Observer at the NHS in Nottingham, where she is dedicated to advancing patient care and expanding her clinical expertise in elderly patient management.

A message from the Vice-Chancellor

A very warm welcome to the 2024 issue of ACH1EVE, the official magazine for University of Chester graduates.

Our Alumni are truly international, some having joined us from across continents and others from the UK who have travelled and made new lives in new countries. It is fascinating to read some of their stories of incredible journeys across the globe, which we are highlighting with this year's theme of 'Around the World'.

In this edition, you'll hear from alumni who share their experiences of joining us from their home countries, through to those who have worked on international projects, our community's impact knows no borders!

There is an opportunity to read about some of the many graduate highlights over the last year and Professor David McGravie our Pro Vice Chancellor for International and Executive Dean of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences describes his recipe for creating multi-national relationships as Chester continues to encourage global student applications!

As Vice Chancellor, I am immensely proud of our global family. Together, we transcend boundaries, enriching lives and leaving footprints on distant shores.

Professor Eunice Simmons
Vice-Chancellor and Principal



University News

Graduate makes impression in world of fashion with highly-anticipated new collection and events

ALEXANDRA Novacki has unveiled her first pre-collection since completing her studies in Fashion Design, in the lead-up to her eagerly-anticipated couture runway, and new images spotlight the crafted, bespoke garments.

Alexandra's work, including pieces designed and created during her time at the University, has featured in the March edition of the magazine, *Schön! Switzerland*.

Alexandra focuses on creating bespoke items that empower the wearer and spark conversation, using the finest of materials and highest of skills.

Alexandra is keeping news on her upcoming couture runway under wraps but is looking forward to continuing her love letter to the High Peak through fashion, with her next collection titled, *The Dark Peak*.

She said: "It's been a huge hill to climb to reach my first postgraduate pre-collection and to have produced such brilliant imagery to showcase the

pieces. So much love and energy went in to creating the images that perfectly capture the Alexandra Novacki 2024 essence. The support since my debut runway has been huge and has given me such motivation to keep producing beautiful fashion."

Alexandra's debut haute couture collection, *Furious Creatures*, was unveiled at Chester Cathedral last year.

Nominated for the title of Emerging British Womenswear Designer at Northern Fashion Week, she has designed and crafted looks for the Cannes Film Festival as well as worked with celebrities including James Martin to create one-off garments. Her work has been displayed on Bond Street and featured in publications including *Swanky Magazine*.



Student delivers double success with a degree and a new baby

ISIMEME Edobor, a primary school teacher in her home country of Nigeria, came to study for an MA Education in Society (now known as the MA Education, Society and Globalisation) at the University of Chester. She graduated at Chester Cathedral in March 2024.

As well as moving to a different country and undertaking a challenging course of study, Isimeme impressed her lecturers with her unwavering commitment to attending her lectures and achieving excellent grades even though she was pregnant.

Isimeme's lecturers describe her as a "true inspiration to female students and first-time mothers" who passed all her assignments at her first attempt and achieved a 94% attendance rate. The sessions she missed were due to her having her baby and she returned to lectures just two weeks after giving birth, despite having a limited support network in the UK.

Isimeme said the most enjoyable part of her studies was "the coming together of different views and perspectives from people of different backgrounds and cultures" which included hearing different accents, appreciating other cultures and learning from the experiences of others in educational settings.

Her dissertation explored the 'challenges and delights' for international students when transitioning to study for a postgraduate course in the UK. She said the opportunity to study in Chester alongside the experiences of her course taught her so much which she can use to further her career.



Chester graduate creates exciting vision for new Cathedral visitor spaces

THE vision and interior design skills of a University of Chester graduate are illustrating the exciting possibilities for new Cathedral spaces in the city.

Ellie Grainger has created a set of stunning designs for Project Discovery which is returning a major piece of Chester Cathedral's architectural heritage, at 30 St Werburgh Street, into its care this year.

The Project will link up the building adjacent to the Cathedral, currently occupied by Barclays Bank, with the Cathedral's visitor entrance, to further boost its presence in the city, provide additional facilities to enhance the visitor experience and connect with city communities.

A Recent BA (Hons) Interior Design graduate, Ellie's visuals highlight how the spaces within the building could be used and how they could look. The images present potential new uses for both the interior and land to the rear of the building, with the aim of promoting initial discussions.

After working with Lynne Bell, University of Chester Interior Design Programme Leader, and alongside Cathedral Project Manager Suzi Bailey to suggest new functions, Ellie produced the series of images showcasing alternative uses, from an art and sculpture gallery and a new visitor reception area to an events space and sculpture garden.

Ellie, who is now working as an exhibition designer, said: "I'm delighted to be part of Project Discovery, this new chapter for the building and all its audiences, and the Cathedral's thriving contribution to Chester life."

The Very Revd Dr Tim Stratford, Dean of Chester said: "The Project Team and I are deeply grateful to Ellie for the work she has done in creating visuals for Project Discovery at Chester Cathedral. This project will see us develop 30 St Werburgh Street, to link up with the Cathedral's visitor entrance, cultivating a confident presence for the Cathedral in Town Hall Square and enabling us to serve the city and community more easily."

Project Discovery launched earlier this year and will be substantially complete in 2028.

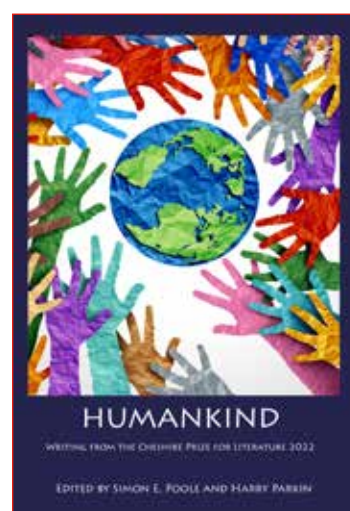
Book and event showcase prize-winning work of Cheshire writers

THE work of Cheshire writers on humankind and the human spirit features in a newly published collection of prize-winning literature after being chosen from hundreds of entries.

Winners, runners-up, and shortlisted authors in the Cheshire Prize for Literature competition, run by the University of Chester

with Storyhouse, gathered in November to celebrate and launch a new anthology of their stories, poems and scriptwriting.

Highlighting people's resilience, kindness and ingenuity, the book, *Humankind: Writing from the Cheshire Prize for Literature 2022*, has been published by the University of Chester Press. Teachers, school pupils, university students, journalists, an actor, film-maker, Counsellor, playwright and a solicitor are among the contributors.



Expeditions across the continents



WORDS BY ROB HOUGHTON

IT was day 18 of the expedition, the 30th of July 2001. We were in the remote Mongolian highlands, an eight-hour helicopter ride from the nearest medical facility, and I was responsible for the physical and mental well-being of eleven 18-year-olds from my old school. My only means of communication with the outside world was a suitcase-sized satellite phone.

We stopped for lunch on the side of a grass-covered mountain with spectacular views down to the wildflower-strewn valley below. While butterflies danced around us, I turned to the students and said:

“Do you know, we’re the first people from our school to see this view. Actually, we’re the first people from Staffordshire to see this view. We’re almost certainly, the first people from Britain to see this view, and it’s possible, we may be the first Europeans to see this view.”

The reason for my confidence was simple. Three months prior I had been standing in Stamford’s, the map shop to end all map shops, in London. If Stamford’s doesn’t have – or can’t get – a map, then it doesn’t exist. And Stamford’s didn’t have a map of the region that I was going to be heading to in Mongolia. We were literally going to be off the map.

Back then, the internet was dial-up, and online shopping didn’t exist. Neither did Google Earth. Fortunately, my degree from Chester, a joint honours in Geography and English, had included a sizable module on GIS: Geographical Information Systems. Back in 1995 when I graduated, GIS was in its infancy. In the Geography department at the time was a PhD student who was

digitising maps one pixel at a time; my undergraduate dissertation, which required me to stitch together several aerial photographs using a new piece of software called Adobe (not photoshop, Adobe!), nearly crashed the department’s computer network as I took up the whole of the 500MB hard drive on the main computer.

Nonetheless, despite the disadvantages of the age, I’d learned a thing or two and I was able to download a satellite image from the NASA website that, with the use of artificial colouring, showed the approximate elevation of the area that I was going to be hiking in. It may have taken more than an hour to download, but at least I had something that looked a bit like a map!

That degree has sent me far from home. Whilst Outer Mongolia is a synonym for remoteness, the lessons I learned and the qualifications I gained in my three years at Chester have enabled me to lead a charmed life of travel to many other, fabulous countries.

I wanted to study English because I loved it, always have, but I wanted to study Geography because, not only did I enjoy the subject, I also wanted to go into Outdoor Education as a career. That I did, modestly at first, with seasonal work in Wales and Alpine France. As I gathered more experience though, I

soon branched out and started working further afield, living in Slovenia for a year, and beginning to lead month-long overseas expeditions like the one to Mongolia. To date, I’ve led educational expeditions on five continents.

“I wanted to study English because I loved it, always have, but I wanted to study Geography because, not only did I enjoy the subject, I also wanted to go into Outdoor Education as a career.”

Later, I qualified as a teacher in Outdoor Activities and English at Bangor University and that super-charged my opportunities. Since then, I’ve worked at Gordonstoun School, our new King’s old alma mater. I’ve taught in Singapore taking students to Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and New Zealand, and latterly, I’ve found myself as the Head of Outdoor Education at Melbourne Girls Grammar School in Melbourne where I currently live.



Rob would love to hear from anyone who knew him during his time at the University of Chester. You can get in touch with him at robh.esq@mac.com

In between, I’ve come back, time and again to English, particularly to creative writing which I have always loved. During a stint living in Copenhagen, I found myself between jobs (Denmark is one of the best places on earth to be unemployed for future reference) and so I pitched the idea of a mountain biking guidebook of Slovenia to Cicerone, the UK’s largest publisher of guidebooks. They accepted and, armed with a contract which proved I wasn’t just a chancer, I managed to blag free accommodation, a loan bike, and friendly guides for eight weeks of research around my favourite little country. It’s a great way to get fit by the way. The result, *Mountain Biking in Slovenia* was published in 2017 and is still available should anyone be planning a trip there in the near future.

Off the back of that book, I’ve had other commissions, writing articles for example about the Three Capes Hike and the Overland Trek here in Australia and a piece about how my dad was really the inventor of the mountain bike for the magazine *MBR* back in the UK.

Back in Mongolia, after our lunch overlooking that beautiful valley, I used my vague printout to navigate us back to our camp. Later in that trip, we crossed over a mountain range on horseback learning from the local Mongol wranglers as we went. We all returned safely. That was only my third overseas assignment at that point, and at the tender age of 26, I had ambition but no idea how far I would travel, nor of the wealth of fabulous experiences I would get from the countries that I visited. While I’ve had my fair share of luck, for the most part, I’ve made those things happen because I’ve been passionate enough to want them. And the spark that lit the fire was my degree from the University of Chester back when there was a computer lab in the library and a pint of lager in the union was a pound.

Life

after leaving the University of Chester

“I embraced the opportunity to immerse myself in the local culture, discovering hidden gems and forging connections with people from all walks of life.”



WORDS BY DR TANVEER AHMED

MY name is Dr Tanveer Ahmed, and I am a full-time lecturer at Scholars School System (Leeds Trinity University) based in Manchester, UK. Today I am going to share my success story after completing my MBA from the UK.

One of the immediate impacts of completing my MBA was the sense of accomplishment and pride that comes with obtaining an advanced degree from the UK. This achievement not only boosted my self-confidence but also sets me apart in a competitive job market. Completing an MBA degree from the University of Chester was a significant milestone, offering opportunities, challenges, growth, and endless possibilities in a new chapter of life. As an international student leaving Chester, I experienced both personal and professional growth opportunities. Reflecting on my experience, I can see how it has shaped me into the individual I am today. It was first bittersweet to say goodbye to the University of Chester, the campus had become my second home, and the friendships I formed with fellow

students from diverse backgrounds enriched my university experience. It was especially tough to say goodbye to teachers who had inspired and led me during my academic journey. I would like to thank Professor Steve Page, Dr Gautam Rajkhowa, and Dr Neil Moore (my research project supervisor). However, I knew that leaving university was just the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

As I stepped out into the real world, I encountered various challenges that tested my resilience and adaptability. With a thorough understanding of business principles, management strategies, and leadership skills, I am well-equipped to excel in various industries, leveraging my studies for valuable assets. After completing my MBA, I'm committed to lifelong learning, adapting to change, and

pursuing passion with purpose and determination. Adjusting to life outside the university bubble and navigating unfamiliar surroundings in a foreign country required me to step outside of my comfort zone. From finding accommodation to securing employment, every aspect of my post-university life demanded careful planning and perseverance. One of the biggest hurdles I faced as an international student was obtaining a student visa to continue living in the UK and to continue my further studies. Navigating the complex immigration system was daunting, but with determination and patience, I eventually secured the necessary documentation to pursue my further studies (doctorate degree) in my field. The process taught me valuable lessons in patience, resilience, and resourcefulness.

Securing my first job after university was a huge achievement that brought a sense of pride and accomplishment. At the same time, it was a testament to the skills and knowledge I had acquired during my time at the University of Chester. However, adjusting to the demands of part-time employment and full-time study presented its own set of challenges. Balancing work responsibilities with personal pursuits and maintaining a healthy work-life balance required careful time management and prioritization. Professionally, leaving Chester opened doors to a world of opportunities. The education and experiences I gained equipped me with the skills and confidence to pursue my career goals with determination. Whether it was applying theoretical knowledge to real-world scenarios or collaborating with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, my university education

laid a strong foundation for success in the professional arena.

On a personal level, leaving the University of Chester allowed me to explore new interests and hobbies outside of academia. I embraced the opportunity to immerse myself in the local culture, discovering hidden gems and forging connections with people from all walks of life. Engaging in community activities and volunteering initiatives provided a sense of fulfilment and belonging in my new environment. After leaving the University of Chester, I had the freedom to pursue my passions on my own path. Whether it was traveling to new destinations, honing my skills through further studies (PhD), I embraced the spirit of lifelong learning and personal development.

The experiences at the University of Chester, coupled with dedication, perseverance, and a never-give-up

mindset, facilitated my personal growth despite challenges and uncertainties post-graduation. It tested my resilience, expanded my horizons, and instilled in me a sense of confidence to embrace the unknown. As I look back on my journey as an international student, I am grateful for the opportunities and experiences that have shaped me into the person I am today. Leaving the University of Chester was not the end of my story but rather the beginning of an exciting new chapter filled with endless possibilities. In conclusion, I would say my life after completing my MBA from Chester was just the beginning of an exciting journey filled with endless possibilities. As I embark on a new life chapter, I've learned to remain curious, resilient, and true to my inherent values. I am open to embrace the challenges, celebrate the victories, and never stop striving for excellence. I believe I have the world to conquer; I should go forth and leave my mark!

Alumni across the world

OUR incredible alumni community can be found all over the world. This map demonstrates some of the areas where larger numbers of our alumni have settled, but we have even more alumni in all different countries.

Looking to network
with alumni in your
country?

Get in touch with us at
alumni@chester.ac.uk
to discuss further.

Russia

Canada

United States

Egypt

India

China

Peru

Brazil

Australia

Key



Over 500
• England
• Scotland
• Wales
• Ireland
• India



Over 200
• Jersey
• China
• Nigeria
• Hong Kong
• Brunei



Over 100
• Malta
• Singapore
• Pakistan
• USA
• Germany



Between 50 & 100
• Bangladesh
• Australia
• Canada
• Norway
• France
• Malaysia
• Spain

MAKE YOUR VOICE COUNT

By taking the Graduate Outcomes survey, you'll be making a valuable contribution to the next generation of students.

TAKE 10 MINUTES TO
10
SHAPE THE FUTURE

We'd love to understand more about your career path and experiences after leaving higher education.

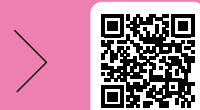
We'll get in touch with you via e-mail or phone to complete the survey, 15 months after you've completed your course.

HESA

Find us on
social media



Find out
more here



Careers and Employability support for graduates

The Chester
Difference
Award

DevelopMe
sessions

Graduate
Peer
Mentoring

Information
resources, mock
interviews and
access to graduate
vacancies

Support
with becoming
self-employed,
freelance or
starting your own
business

One-to-one
advice and
guidance

Graduate
Internships

Get in touch to see how we can support you
with the next chapter of your Chester story

Email: careers@chester.ac.uk
CareerHub: careers.chester.ac.uk

*Access to the above support may depend on eligibility criteria

Careers and
Employability

 University of
Chester

Directorate of Access, Skills and Apprenticeships

Navigating the Road to Professional Growth: Insights from Employment

WORDS BY DANIELLE OWEN

IN the fast-paced world of modern business, professional growth can seem like an uphill battle. My journey from an entry-level postgraduate to various managerial positions has been filled with both challenges and triumphs. I've had the pleasure of working with incredible companies including Pfizer, MARSS and Survitec Group.

Each role gave me so many valuable lessons on leadership, perseverance, and personal growth, and I want to share experiences and top tips in the hopes that I can help guide others on their paths to professional success.

1 Develop a Growth Mindset & Embrace Challenges

A growth mindset has been a guiding principle throughout my career. I view setbacks as opportunities to learn and improve. Has someone in your management team wanted a last-minute major change? Has a supplier pulled out at the last minute? Have your event graphics and marketing materials not arrived on time? These are all situations I've faced over the years. By having an open and understanding mindset to help tackle challenging situations, it's expanded my knowledge greatly and allowed me to continuously evolve both personally and professionally.

It's easier said than done when it comes to facing challenges head on, but instead of shying away from difficult situations, and sometimes even difficult personalities, I embraced them as opportunities for growth. Is there room to compromise? How can we both accomplish our goals? What's the path of least resistance? Tackling challenges head-on not only saved me a lot of time, but also helped develop resilience, problem-solving skills, and the ability to thrive under pressure. These are skills that can sometimes take time to accept and implement, but I promise you it's worth it!

“One of the key factors that propelled my career forward was my willingness to take initiative.”

2 Take Initiative & Lead with Integrity

One of the key factors that propelled my career forward was my willingness to take initiative. Rather than waiting for opportunities to come to me, I actively sought them out and made suggestions for improvement for existing projects. What events and exhibitions should we be attending? How can we improve our digital marketing strategy? Do we need to partner with influencers to make our social media content stand out? I've asked myself all of these questions and from my experience, if you're asking, it's probably because you need to make those changes!

As my career progressed to managerial positions, I made a conscious effort to lead with integrity. Building trust with my team, being transparent in my decision-making, and treating others with respect were all integral to my success as a leader. Leading by example helped me to create a positive work environment and foster a culture of collaboration, while also working proudly with my team to execute incredible marketing campaigns and events. Don't be shy to take on new challenges for your business. Suggesting new ways for growth shows your commitment to the organisation!

3 Build Strong Relationships & Learn from Others

Entering a new role may be daunting as you're 'picking up the pieces' from your predecessor. How can you pick up the work that was in motion prior to you, but also put your own stamp on it? How long will it be until you feel like you're really part of the team? What experiences and skills can you bring into this role? Trust me, we've all had these questions! In the corporate world, relationships are everything. Building strong, genuine connections with colleagues, clients, and stakeholders has been instrumental in my journey. These relationships can sometimes take time to build, but have provided me with opportunities, support, and valuable feedback that I will always cherish.

I was thankful to have such an influential and supportive manager during my first role in Survitec Group. Without his guidance, expertise, and introductions to his professional connections, I hesitate to think of where I'd be in my career today! Whether you're in a managerial position, or starting at entry-level, learning from others is one of the most valuable skills you can have.

Understanding this mindset allows you to gain diverse perspectives, expand your knowledge, and improve problem-solving abilities. It's one of the easier skills to gain but not one to be overlooked!

4 Last but not least, Embrace the Journey!

Starting at the bottom and working your way up is no easy task. I began my career as an entry-level postgraduate, fresh out of university and eager to make my mark. My first role out of university was as the Marketing Executive at Survitec Group. This really challenged me as a female working in a male-dominated industry (defense and aerospace), and I quickly learned that I needed to show off my creative talent, team-working skills and competitive edge to make myself stand out!

Over the next four years of employment at Survitec Group, I worked hard to showcase my talents and knowledge, proudly managing hundreds of global events, launching new corporate websites, and introducing new, innovative lifesaving technologies and products into the industry. I often look back on my experiences in this role as I truly feel it helped shape and guide me towards the path that I'm on today. Working for a company that helped save millions of lives gave me the focus, commitment and drive for my role and it's something that I've applied to every working day since.



Final Words

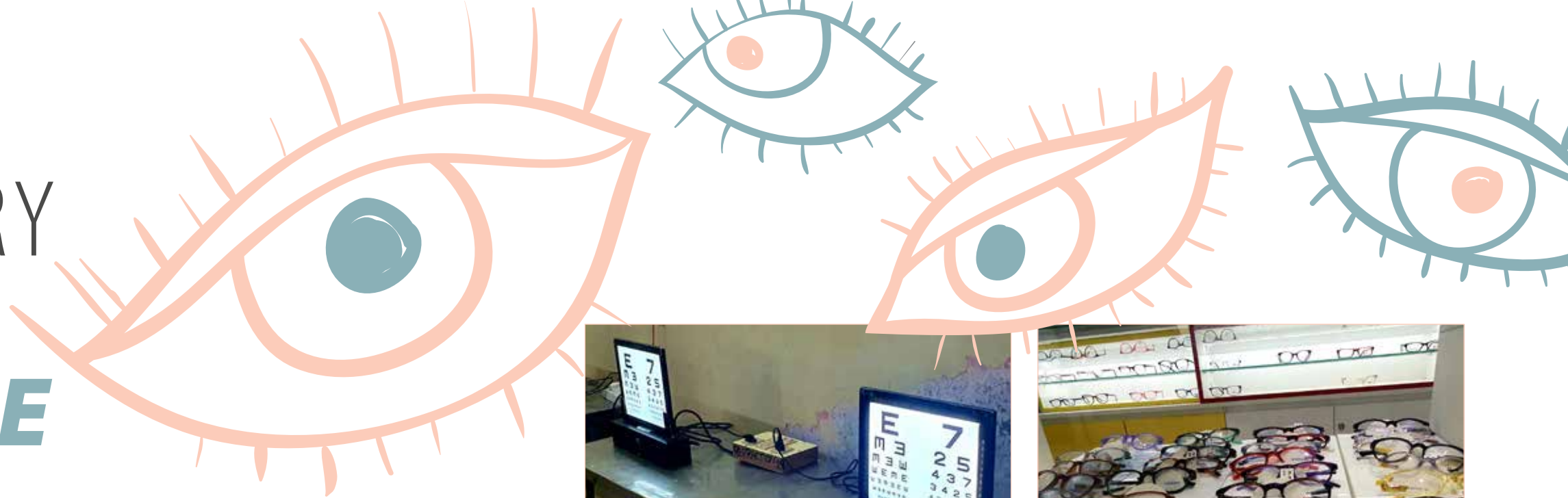
My career journey has been filled with invaluable lessons. By embracing the journey, taking initiative, learning from mentors, building strong relationships, and leading with integrity, it's led me to gain more knowledge and experience than I ever could have imagined within a 9-year time frame. Now, at the birth of my own business, Twisted Lemon Creative Agency, I take the experiences I've had and the lessons I've learned along the way to help me towards future success.

I hope that my own lessons can serve as a guide for anyone looking to make strides in their own career. Remember, success is not just about reaching the top – it's about growing every step of the way.

www.linkedin.com/in/danielleowen93

www.twistedlemoncreative.com

THE VISIONARY *POWER* *OF PURPOSE*



A visit to Aravind Eye Care

WORDS BY HILARY BERG

ACROSS India, 75 million people are blind or visually impaired.

Poverty is both a cause and an effect of blindness, and it has a devastating impact on people's lives, limiting their interaction with family and community, education, work, and prosperity. But thanks to an extraordinary organisation, Aravind Eye Care, millions have been given the gift of vision.

My experience completing a work-based masters at Chester under the guidance of the legendary Dr Dave Perrin and Danny Moss, Emeritus Professor in Corporate and Public Affairs, left me with a deep appreciation of experiential learning and a real commitment to continue my learning journey wherever possible through my work.

In February I was privileged to join a study tour to Tamil Nadu with Wavelength, an immersive UK-based leadership programme, to learn from Aravind's remarkable business model.

Established in 1976 by retired eye surgeon Dr Govindappa Venkataswamy, known affectionately as Dr V; Aravind was created with the simple purpose of

eliminating needless blindness. It started as an 11-bedroom hospital and has grown into India's biggest eye care provider, delivering 65 million outpatient visits and almost 8 million surgeries.

Almost 50 years on, Dr V's ambition remains at the heart of this not-for-profit business that provides free or subsidised services to half its patients. Treatment is just part of a sustainable business model that includes education, research, capacity-building with hospitals (its open learning network spans 29 countries), and the manufacture of affordable ophthalmic products.

Patients were out in force at the eye screening camp I visited in the dusty back streets of Madurai; a wedding hall taken over for the day by an outreach team of eyecare professionals. Many of them were smiling, smartly dressed young women; graduates of Aravind's two-year training programme that recruits hundreds of 18-year-old girls from rural villages annually and trains them in specialised healthcare roles, freeing up doctors to focus on core operations.

This is because in a typical healthcare setting, over 80% of tasks performed by

“It was inspiring to see the power of purpose delivering commercial results at Aravind, and how that in turn creates extraordinary social impact.”

doctors are routine and repetitive, like delivering eyesight tests and assessing refractive error, as well as prepping patients for surgery. These highly trained young women can quadruple the productivity of a single ophthalmologist.

Partnered by local businesses, schools and colleges, and community groups, trusted by local people, day clinics provide free transport, facilities, and food. Along with hospital walk-ins, they reach 4 million patients a year.

Outside the wedding hall, queuing patients, many helped by relatives, registered, and were guided with kind efficiency around a series of stations

where they undertook health checks and discussed treatments. Eyesight was tested using special symbols for those who couldn't read.

Some simply left with spectacles, provided at a subsidised cost or free. Upstairs, in a sunny, brightly-painted hall, patients selected for cataract surgery the following day gathered at long wooden tables. The atmosphere was busy but calm, with groups of patients chatting and being helped with paperwork.

Counselling was available for anyone with worries. Aravind employs hundreds of patient counsellors who make sure patients understand their treatment, whether that is spectacles, medication, or surgery, and the follow up support needed, much of which is delivered in the community.

700,000 people are operated on yearly in Aravind's 14 hospitals, a process we saw firsthand in Madurai and Chennai. My impression was the overwhelming drive for social equity. The same quality treatment is provided to everyone; those able to pay are simply able to access additional comfort (a recovery bed opposed to a sleeping mat, or even a private room). The speed and efficiency we saw would be the envy of

Western hospitals; patients prepped while several experienced surgeons work with dexterity and skill, moving from one operating table to the next. Hospital stay is minimal, and patients access support and rehabilitation in their communities.

Meanwhile, the wider business model drives profit for reinvestment in treatment, including from the manufacture of sutures, eye drops and surgical equipment. Sales to 160 countries mean that the business now has a 12% share of the intra-ocular lens market.

Aravind is inspirational. Our visit was not unusual, as its leaders openly share their learnings with international businesses keen to understand innovation. And there was so much to learn. Its team live their values. Relentlessly curious about how to improve, dedicated to open sourcing their models, and striving for simplicity and excellence.

But my colleagues and I agreed we were most impressed with their unwavering dedication to social purpose. From the CEO to the young women we spoke to in training as counsellors, administrators, and technicians, everyone was crystal clear that their personal task was to change

people's lives. By eliminating unnecessary blindness.

My work involves helping businesses to plan and deliver sustainability strategy, with a focus on social as well as climate justice. It was inspiring to see the power of purpose delivering commercial results at Aravind, and how that in turn creates extraordinary social impact.

In rural India, where giving someone their sight is known to dramatically improve quality of life, and their potential to learn and earn, the true scale of Aravind's impact on millions of people, their families and communities can only be imagined.



Chester International Film Festival 2024

THIS March, the Languages and Cultures subject area, was delighted to sponsor the Chester International Film Festival 2024 for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year, the festival ran from 1st to 8th March and was organised by the Chester Film Society, which is currently in its 54th year and which “offers the people of Chester and surrounding areas the chance to see some of the finer films of world cinema in a relaxing and appreciative atmosphere”. This is achieved through an annual season of screenings, in addition to organising the International Film Festival itself and the Society aims to seek out films that often miss the cinema and/or streaming services. The festival’s current home is the



“This year’s festival included four pre-release UK previews and the opening and closing nights both included Oscar nominated movies.”

lovely Storyhouse cinema, and it takes place annually. The Languages and Cultures staff team, along with Visiting Lecturers working on the Languages for All evening classes, provided speakers introducing each film and were available for discussion after the screenings.

This year’s festival included four pre-release UK previews and the opening and closing nights both included Oscar nominated movies. One of these was *Monster*, a film from the Japanese director Kore-Eda Hirokazu which played to a full house on the first night and explores multiple perspectives on the truth about an incident involving a school student. The gripping German film *The Teacher’s Lounge*, which was screened to a packed Storyhouse cinema on the closing night, also deals with an incident that takes place in a school and challenges how we match our ideals with the realities of the systems in which we live and work. Another key theme of the festival was migration with the devastating *lo Capitano*, made in Wolof and French, telling the story of two young Senegalese men who survive a harrowing and brutal journey across the Sahara and the Mediterranean in a desperate quest for a new life in Europe. Agnieszka Holland’s *Green Border* examines the plight of refugees from the Middle East and Africa caught up in the recent humanitarian crisis on the border between Belarus and Poland and was voted to receive the Audience Choice Award by the public attending the festival. The two other feature films, each screened for the first time in Chester, shared themes of grief. *Tótem*, a film from Mexico deals with the experience of loss when a child begins to understand that she is at her grandfather’s last birthday party, while *Tarrac*, set on the Kerry coast in Ireland, follows a woman whose father is terminally ill

and who becomes involved in the rowing team of her home village. The festival also included the Chester International Animation Festival which welcomed entries from animators from a range of countries and the audience were able to vote for Audience Award winner at the screening of the final selection.

Along with the general public and members of the Chester Film Society, undergraduates, alumni and evening class students as well as a number of current and retired teaching staff from a range of subject areas at the University could be seen in the audience each night. Associate Professor Mark Gant, stated that “like the study of languages and their associated cultures, the International Film Festival provides the people of Chester and its surrounding sub-region with the opportunity to travel in our imaginations without leaving the city, exploring the perspectives and contexts of others and immersing ourselves in the sounds of a diverse range of tongues, so for the Languages and Cultures team, the partnership is a particularly appropriate one. This year I was transported to beautiful, challenging and deeply moving situations facing fellow human beings in other parts of the globe and have been enriched by films that I wouldn’t otherwise have had the opportunity to see”.

Next year’s festival, which will once again take place at Storyhouse, is in the early planning stages, but Storyhouse are planning to expand it considerably, involving students from the University and the Division of Communication, Screen and Performance will be involved alongside the Centre for Student Exchange and Language Development, which is the new home for English for Academic Purposes, Study Abroad, Languages and Cultures and Languages for All.

From Nigeria

to Chester

WORDS BY BAMIKOLE ABIODUN

AS a young boy who grew up on the streets of Akure, Ondo State, Nigeria, it has always been my dream to experience education in the United Kingdom, as I have always believed it is the country that is the home of civility.

I got close to achieving this dream in September 2016, but unfortunately, I could not pursue it due to financial constraints as I had admission offers from multiple Universities. However, in 2022, that was not the case as I had worked hard in the previous four years to save enough money, and I then received my conditional offer of admission from the University of Chester.

I resumed school with a lot of excitement and aspiration to make a mark academically and contribute to my community. I was quick to volunteer to be student voice rep for my department which gave me the opportunity to gather feedback from students and channel them to the appropriate quarters to enhance the overall student experience. The role also required signposting students to various support systems available in the university for their needs. This was something I greatly enjoyed doing. While I was at it, I ensured my academics were not suffering and I committed a lot of time to adapt to the changes between the educational

system of the UK and my home country. This led to me having a distinction at the earliest possible time as I had straight A(s) in all the first 6 out of 8 modules I did.

During this period, I also enjoyed providing support to other students in my class with their assessment. I created an online peer to peer support platform that helped students across the program better understand their assessments. I also created a virtual social group for a cross section of different MBA cohorts to allow students to share experiences and network beyond their cohort. I was invited by the program director of the MBA to give speeches to new cohorts of students on how to navigate the program to success. This was an opportunity I was always eager to jump on. Since I graduated, I have continued to provide support to students at the University of Chester as well as other universities in the UK. I have helped to review and provided feedback directly to over 23 students since I graduated.



“

I was quick to volunteer to be student voice rep for my department which gave me the opportunity to gather feedback from students and channel them to the appropriate quarters to enhance the overall student experience.

”

As a student, I worked closely with the careers and employability team and the skills I learnt have been extremely helpful since I graduated. My efforts in learning all these skills and my volunteering were both recognized by the unit with a Chester difference award for excellence and a Chester volunteer award silver.

Since I graduated, my passion for problem solving led me to identifying gaps in the consultancy space in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector in my home country, I have since founded a business consultancy firm that looks to provide agile business solutions for small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria named BGC. While BGC has the capability to provide solutions to local businesses, it has been designed with capabilities to be global in a short period. The creation of BGC was possible because of all the capabilities I developed in my MBA program and the experiences I have amassed over the years.

BGC as a premier consultancy firm has been designed and structured to empower SMEs in Nigeria to achieve

sustainable growth and success. BGC relies on carefully tailored strategies, innovative solutions, and hands-on support for our partners' business to drive growth, overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and thrive in the very competitive FMCG marketplace. The comprehensive services provided by BGC cuts across general business consultancy, marketing and branding, operational excellence, and financial advisory, catering to a diverse clientele spanning various cities. We adopt a client-centric approach and a commitment to delivering measurable results. BGC combines industry expertise, analytical rigor, and creative thinking to develop customized solutions that drive business growth and achieve tangible outcomes.

At the core of BGC, we prioritize collaboration, transparency, and client satisfaction in every engagement. Our team of seasoned professionals works closely with clients to understand their unique needs, develop strategies aligned with their objectives, and deliver measureable results-driven solutions that create long-term value. Whether it's enhancing brand visibility,

increasing sales, optimizing operational efficiency, or maximizing financial performance, BGC is dedicated to empowering SMEs to unlock their full potential and thrive in today's dynamic business environment.

I have also been working on the restructuring of a non-governmental organization (NGO) - Dynamic Youth Movement. I founded this a few years ago alongside other students in my home country with the vision to raise responsible youths necessary for nation building. Our initial scope of activities involved public enlightenment, teenager outreach, visits to secondary schools and social campaigns for youths to take the lead and be the change in their society. Our activities were fully self-funded, and we worked with a few volunteers. I have now been working to change the existing structure to drive more agility and efficiency needed to achieve our ambition. As someone who has had the opportunity to travel across the world and access education, I believe it is important for me to give back to the society I came from, and this has been the motivation driving the organization.

Sport and fitness around the world

WORDS BY SARAH HART

GROWING up, exploring the world was always a dream of mine, and I was incredibly fortunate to travel a lot with my family from a young age. I took a year out before starting university to travel to Australia, and 6 months out after graduating to travel across South East Asia and New Zealand – I was curious, adventurous and had wanderlust in abundance. The experiences I gained were beyond enriching and opened my eyes to broader horizons. I knew if I could find a career that would allow me to continue to pursue my dream to explore more corners of the globe, it would be a fulfilling one.

I studied at the University of Chester between 2009-2012, gaining a first-class degree in Business Studies & Events Management (BA Hons). I loved every minute of university life; the academic side, the social side, and being part of Chester's Dance Society for 3 years. I was incredibly conscientious with my studies, but rarely missed a Wednesday club social or SU Friday (#balance).

After graduating in 2012, I worked in a number of business, management and marketing roles, before co-founding my own business in 2019 with my now husband. Our company The Movement Blueprint, or MBP as we're often known, is an online fitness, training, and education platform, serving thousands of everyday gym-goers, athletes and coaches globally. To date, some of our biggest achievements include

engineering new world records, our client success rate from injury rehabilitation back to full performance, delivering education seminars to coaches and personal trainers globally (including the likes of Virgin Active and the Ministry Of Defence), speaking at various leading industry events, being featured in the UK's highest circulation print newspaper, securing a column in a leading monthly fitness magazine (including a front cover), hosting our own community events and partnering with some of the most influential brands in the fitness space (including the likes of lululemon, Men's Health and Giant).

Sport and fitness had been a passion of mine since a very young age, and I hadn't ever dreamed I'd be able to blend my skillset in business and marketing with my greatest hobby to forge my career. Passion, determination and hard work really do pay off.

Launching a business right before the pandemic certainly had its challenges, but challenges we tackled head on and found creative solutions to - in many ways, as an online business, lockdown was a huge catalyst for our early growth. What lockdown did do was further fuel a burning desire to travel - not just beyond our 5-mile radius, but further afield.

In 2022, myself and my partner decided to take our business 'on the road' - we wanted to immerse



“As a marathon runner with big dreams, the opportunity to toe the line in different countries and chase my goals as an athlete is something I'll never truly be able to put into words, and I'm incredibly grateful that my career continues to allow me to do so.”

ourselves in some of the fastest growing fitness markets around the world, connect with other expert practitioners, and introduce our brand to new communities along the way. We have since spent extensive time in California, Dubai, Australia and various destinations in Europe. Taking MBP around the world has been an incredible experience, both for business and personal growth.

For business, travelling has allowed us to network, research and connect with not only like-minded people, but other experts in their craft. The fitness industry continues to grow exponentially - seeking out opportunities in other countries and markets is a pivotal

ingredient to our continued growth and expansion as a company.

From a personal stance, new environments have an incredible way of harnessing creativity, self-discovery and opportunity. For me personally, I find so much calm and tranquillity being in warm climates by the sea - it helps me regain perspective and compartmentalise stress and pressure. Striking balance and prioritising wellbeing can be incredibly difficult when you're steering the ship, but it is perhaps the most crucial element for sustainable growth. Providing yourself with opportunities to explore new places and carving out time to nourish your mind truly does pay dividends in more ways than one.

I have also taken my passion for running around the world, competing in races across the globe. As a marathon runner with big dreams, the opportunity to toe the line in different countries and chase my goals as an athlete is something I'll never truly be able to put into words, and I'm incredibly grateful that my career continues to allow me to do so.

Travel forces you to step out of what's familiar, encouraging you to adapt and react. I truly believe in the power of your environment, and the importance of putting yourself in places of opportunity. Moments and chances rarely find you - it's about you going out of your way to find them, even if that means boarding a plane.



The Alumni Archive

IN last year's edition of ACH1EVE, we introduced you to our Alumni Archive, which is currently being held in the holding cells below Chester Crown Courts in the Wheeler Building.

We have a collection of items from over the last 100 years, with many artifacts donated by you, our dedicated community. We have been hard at work cataloguing and organizing the many items we have and are delighted to showcase just a few of these below.

The College Bible

The College Bible has been in the institution since the early 20th century and was recently rediscovered by our Chaplaincy team. It required extensive restoration before it could be used again.

The bible would have been read from by the chaplain every day during a chapel service.

The restoration of the Bible was generously funded by an alumni donor, helping to conserve this historical artefact so that it can continue to be enjoyed by future generations at the University, for many years to come.

Back in May the decision was made to bring the bible back to the Chapel on Exton Park Campus, It is now on display in a secure Perspex casing.

We're delighted to have the bible on display in Chapel.



As Dean of Chapel it has been a great joy to see the beautiful College Bible fully restored and on display in Chapel for people to enjoy. It is an important part of our history as a university, dating back to 1908 and the formative years of our foundation as Chester College. I have been reflecting a little on what life may have been like for students and staff back in 1908. Well, to give you some context of the world at that time, Shackleton set sail from New Zealand on the Nimrod as part of the British Antarctic Expedition, the Wright brothers proved to the world that they had mastered that art of flight, the suffragettes were active in and around parliament, and Henry Ford launched the first Model T car. This gives us a snapshot into the wider world people were living in when someone stood up in Chapel and read from this Bible in 1908!

Please do pop in to Chapel to see the Bible that is displayed alongside the wonderfully crafted quilt made by our alumni for our 175th anniversary.

Revd Dr Gill Reeve
(Senior Chaplain & Dean of Chapel)

Glass Slides

These glass slides were kindly donated by Dr David Hooper who was the Head of Science from 1958 to 1982. The glass slides include photographs and drawings of anatomies of various plants and insects and were produced by students as part of their science coursework. This is just a selection from our collection in the archive. Dr Hooper died in 2021.



We need your support

THE giving of time and funds is part of the fabric of who we are and has been since the beginning of our institution – starting with a city subscription to support the founding of a College, and students volunteering their time and talent to build our Chapel.

Thank you

A heartfelt thank you to those of you who already donate regularly to our wonderful University. Your kindness makes such a difference to current students and our ability to support them to achieve their very best experience through things like study trips, graduation gown hire, access to conferences and further learning and so much more. It also helps in many other ways including helping us to build our Alumni Archive, with projects such as the restoration of the College Bible, which you can read more about on the previous page.

Thank you from all of us for your support.

Can you support us?

If you are able to join others and give a regular donation, you can help us plan for the students of today, and of the future, to have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential at Chester. Could you continue your Chester Story by giving regularly?

It's never been easier to give a regular gift. You can do so, simply through our online giving platform, Charities Aid Foundation. You can choose how much to give whether that's £3, £10 or more, and how often, from monthly, quarterly to annually. No matter what you choose to give, giving regularly, can make a huge difference. As a regular donor, you

will receive regular updates from us about how your donations are helping the students and graduates of today.

Giving a little, can make all the difference in helping students and graduates achieve even more. You are part of our past, present, and future, and we look forward to continuing our story with you.

Contact us at alumni@chester.ac.uk.

We will continue to provide updates on the archive in our monthly alumni newsletter, so please ensure your details are up to date with us so you can receive all the latest news.

My Chester Story

Assel Bekmagambetova

MY experience of moving to the UK to study was fantastic and those years were some of the best years of my life so far. Even though it wasn't completely what I expected, it doesn't make it any less meaningful for me. I moved during the pandemic, and all the uncertainty that was associated with it meant it was quite stressful as the lockdown rules were changing so quickly, and nobody knew what to expect. But it was still possible for me to move there which I am so grateful for, even now. What I am especially grateful for is all the amazing and fascinating people I met during my studies there - I was lucky to meet and even make friends with people from Pakistan, Syria, UK, Tanzania, Brazil, Ukraine, France, Spain, India, Italy, Türkiye, Nigeria, and Kenya.

Studying at the University of Chester was a life-changing experience. I really consider myself lucky because I was blessed to live with a wonderful and sweet girl, who was the best flatmate. I do believe she was the main reason my adaptation went so smoothly, even during quarantine. Even though we lived together for quite a short time, we made wonderful memories together and remain in touch even now. She was from Tanzania, and I still have a few wonderful presents from there that I cherish and love very dearly. We spoke a lot about our homelands, differences in upbringing and about what we believe in, as well as so much more. I

do believe that nothing teaches you better than a lived experience of encountering a different culture.

My course professors were fantastic too - even though I didn't have a chance to study on campus, our online lectures were no less than fascinating. When the lockdown was lifted, me and my UK friends hit the pub - I still remember how we spent six hours in a pub garden absolutely freezing, and later it has become a tradition. Even though we grew up in such different countries, we quickly found common ground in the things we loved.

Before I moved to Chester, I realised I wanted to volunteer as much as I could during my studies there and thankfully, I got a few chances to do so. My volunteering experience at the Chester Cathedral was probably the most memorable highlight of my studies. I was honoured to volunteer there twice, and now I want to share a bit more about these experiences.

The first time I volunteered there was the summer of 2021. The annual Chester Heritage Week was calling for History and Archaeology students to demonstrate Bishop Jacobson's book conservation skills at the Chester Cathedral Nave. Even though I didn't have any prior book conservation experience, I still decided to apply, and I remember how scared I was when I got selected. I was afraid that I would do something wrong and cause some



“My volunteering experience at the Chester Cathedral was probably the most memorable highlight of my studies.”



damage. But our supervisors - Naomi Watts-Kito and Emily Lannigan were amazing and after our initial training, I felt much more confident. As part of this training, we got a chance to properly explore the Cathedral and we even got onto the Cathedral roof.

Learning about book conservation was so much fun, our lovely supervisors helped us navigate how to use brushes and special sponges, as well as how to properly assess the books condition and apply the tying tape. The latter was indeed useful since some books were very old and fragile - they were literally falling apart the very moment you touched them. The oldest book I worked on was dated 1562 and some of my fellow volunteers had books that were even older. Speaking about my fellow volunteers - I really am glad I got a chance to meet so many new fascinating Chester students during this volunteering experience. Throughout

those days, there was a lot of fun, laughter, and encouragement among us. We always tried to be there for each other and do everything we could if someone needed help. I will be forever grateful for those fascinating days!

The next time I volunteered at the Chester Cathedral was in September 2021. The University of Chester Professor - Catherine Wilson was setting up a pop-up exhibition for her Mobility of Objects Project as part of Chester Cathedral Medieval Discovery Day. The purpose of this exhibition was to encourage the Cathedral public to interact with the Grosvenor Museum exhibits that were excavated in and around Chester around 1300-1600. Those Objects included the pilgrim badges, devotional tokens that came from places like Canterbury and Rome, keys, tiles from St John's cathedral in Chester and leather shoes. As part of this exhibition, we

were given a handling session worksheet with several questions to encourage discussion with the Cathedral visitors. Those questions were about the objects' texture, colour, scale, about the signs of use and reuse. Again, discussing these objects with the Cathedral visitors was a massive step outside of my comfort zone, but it turned out great and I genuinely enjoyed interacting with such a lovely volunteering team and the Cathedral Public.

Those were incredible experiences that have not only taught me some practical skills, like book conservation techniques and handling museum exhibits, but have also showed me that stepping out of your comfort zone can bring you to some places where stability and predictability wouldn't. You do not have to have it all together or be 100% qualified to try and learn new things.

Reflecting on my journey

Dr Nawmi Nahar Nova

IN the heart of England lies a city that holds within its ancient walls not only history but also the promise of transformative experiences. My journey began with trepidation as I embarked on a new chapter of my life, leaving behind the familiar comforts of home to pursue my Master of Science in Diabetes at the esteemed University of Chester. Little did I know that this city would become more than just a temporary abode; it would become a cherished part of my story, intertwined with love, learning, and lasting memories.

Stepping foot in Chester for the first time, I was struck by its picturesque charm and rich heritage. As I navigated its cobbled streets and explored its Roman ruins, I felt a sense of awe and wonder wash over me. It was my first time being on my own in a different country, and the initial apprehension soon gave way to excitement as I immersed myself in the vibrant tapestry of life that Chester had to offer.

Amidst the hustle and bustle of academic pursuits, I found solace in the warmth and support of my mentors, supervisors, and course mates. Their guidance and encouragement fuelled my passion for my field of study, propelling me to delve deeper into the complexities of diabetes research and management. Together, we shared not only knowledge but also camaraderie, forming bonds that would last a lifetime.

However, amidst my academic endeavours, fate had another plan in store for me. It was within the halls of the university that I met the love of my life. As our paths converged, our friendship blossomed into something deeper, and before long, we knew that we were destined to be together. Our love story unfolded against the backdrop of lectures, late-night study sessions, and shared laughter, weaving itself seamlessly into the fabric of our university experience. As our graduation day approached, there was an undeniable sense of anticipation in the air. Not only were we about to receive our hard-earned degrees, but we were also preparing to embark on a new chapter of our lives together. We got married in our home country Bangladesh and started a new journey together. Walking hand in hand with my husband across the stage, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude. Our journey had been marked by challenges and triumphs, laughter and tears, but through it all, we had remained steadfast in our pursuit of knowledge and love. As we tossed our caps into the air, celebrating not only our academic achievements but also our love story, I knew that Chester would always hold a special place in our hearts.

Now, as I find myself reminiscing about my time in Chester from the bustling streets of Nottingham, I am filled with a sense of nostalgia. Though I may be miles away from the city that became my home, its memory continues to linger, a testament to the transformative power of new beginnings and the enduring bonds of love and friendship. Chester may be a chapter in my past, but its influence will forever shape the chapters yet to come.

My country Bangladesh and England represent two distinct cultural and environmental landscapes, each with its own unique charm and challenges. My journey from the bustling streets of Dhaka to the serene environs of Chester was transformative, offering a blend of stark contrasts and enriching experiences. This journey was not just a geographical shift but a deep dive into different worlds of culture, weather, and diversity. Bangladesh, with its rich tapestry of traditions, festivals, and social customs, is a land where cultural vibrancy is palpable.



The streets are alive with the sounds of bustling markets, the aroma of street food, and the colours of countless festivals such as Pohela Boishakh (Bengali New Year) and Eid. Social interactions are deeply rooted in family values and communal living, where the community often plays a pivotal role in one's life. In contrast, Chester, a historic city in England, exudes a different kind of cultural richness. It's a place where medieval architecture coexists with modern amenities. The cultural scene is marked by its historical landmarks, the Chester Rows, and the remnants of Roman history, which offer a serene and reflective ambiance. Social interactions here are more individualistic, with a focus on personal space and privacy, which initially felt quite different from the close-knit community interactions back home.

Weather in Bangladesh is characterized by a tropical monsoon climate, with hot, humid summers, a rainy season that brings life to the fields, and mild winters. The constant warmth and periodic rain showers are integral to life, influencing everything from daily routines to agricultural practices. Chester, on the other hand, presents a temperate maritime climate. The weather here is milder, with cool summers and gentle winters, a stark contrast to the extreme humidity and heat I was accustomed to. The frequent rain and overcast skies of Chester

added a new dimension to my daily life, making the environment feel both refreshing and, at times, melancholic.

Bangladesh is relatively homogenous in terms of ethnicity and language, with Bengali being the predominant language spoken. The societal fabric is interwoven with shared cultural norms and values, providing a sense of unity and common identity. Chester offers a more diverse cultural landscape. The University of Chester, where I pursued my MSc in Diabetes, is a microcosm of global cultures, bringing together students from various backgrounds. This diversity was both exciting and challenging, as it required adapting to different accents, cuisines, and world views. However, it also enriched my learning experience, providing a global perspective on healthcare practices.

Embarking on an MSc in Diabetes at the University of Chester was a thrilling yet daunting endeavour. Coming from a medical background, I was familiar with clinical concepts but less so with the intensive calculations and research methodologies required. The initial feeling was overwhelming, but the support system at the university made a significant difference. The mentors and professors were incredibly supportive, offering timely guidance and constructive feedback. Their approachability and willingness to help eased my transition into the academic rigor of the course. My

“My country Bangladesh and England represent two distinct cultural and environmental landscapes, each with its own unique charm and challenges.”

course mates, hailing from various professional backgrounds, also played a crucial role in this journey. The collaborative environment fostered by group discussions and projects helped bridge the knowledge gaps and build a cohesive learning community. The supervisors were particularly noteworthy for their responsiveness. Their prompt feedback and willingness to engage in discussions beyond the classroom hours made a substantial impact on my academic progress. This support was instrumental in overcoming the initial hurdles and excelling in the coursework.

Reflecting on my journey, the transition from Bangladesh to Chester has been a blend of contrasts and confluences. The cultural, climatic, and social differences enriched my experience, while the robust support system at the University of Chester ensured that my academic pursuit was both successful and fulfilling. This journey has not only broadened my horizons but also reinforced the value of adaptability and continuous learning.



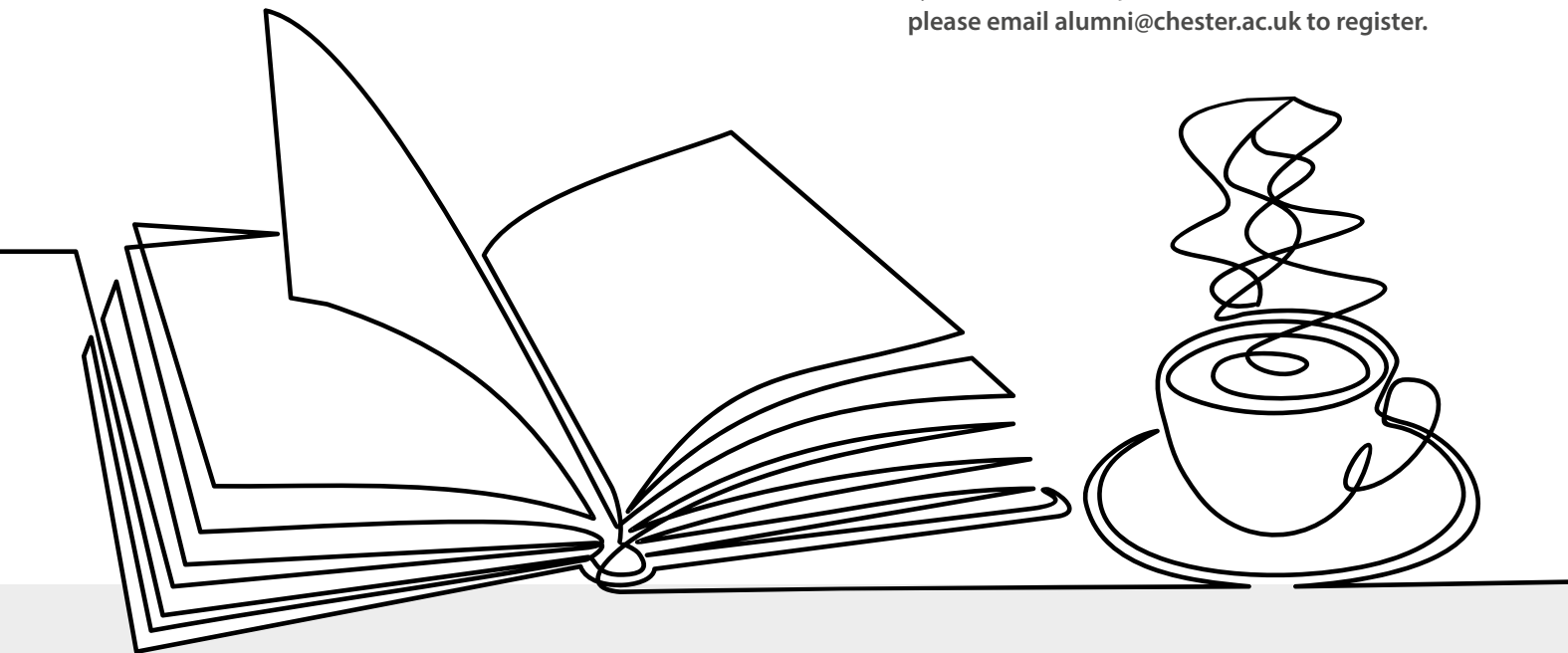
The Alumni Book Club

IN last year's edition of ACH1EVE magazine, we introduced our new alumni book club. Since then, we've had an incredible year of reading books together.

We hold a meeting every two months, giving our members plenty of time to read each book. Each new book is then selected by our members, and they've picked some amazing books so far this year!

You can still join our alumni book club. There is no cost to join, you just have to source a copy of the books. It is hosted online, so you can join in from anywhere. If you have on average 30 minutes a week to read, you should be able to finish each book. There is no required level of participation in group discussions; so, if you don't have time to read one of the books that's okay.

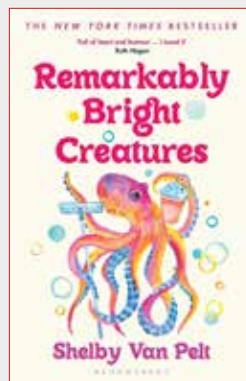
If you would like to join the alumni book club – please email alumni@chester.ac.uk to register.



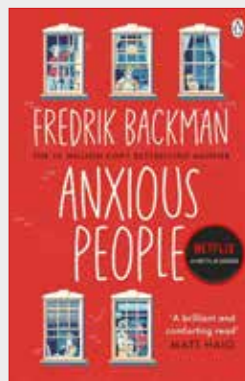
Check out some of the books we've read so far this year below:



Memphis
Tara M. Stringfellow



Remarkably Bright Creatures
Shelby Van Pelt



Anxious People
Fredrik Backman



The List
Yomi Adegoke



Just the Nicest Couple
Mary Kubica



Postgraduate Information Events

Our postgraduate events give you the opportunity to learn about the courses on offer, how they can be tailored to your needs, and what you can get from a postgraduate degree at Chester.

chester.ac.uk/study/postgraduate

Scan here
to book



25%
Discount
for University
of Chester
Graduates*

*Graduate loyalty discount offers 25% off qualifying postgraduate taught Master's courses for 2024/25 academic year



Internationalisation

Professor David McGravie (PVC, International) describes the recipe for creating relationships across borders (and time zones!).

Looking tired, a little dishevelled but embracing the culture (i.e. viewing that dish with suspicion as you do not recognise it) all go a long way to forging productive international relationships and partnerships, but obviously these behaviours alone will not deliver success or guarantee a sustainable partnership. But they are a good start!

THE work of the academic engaged in international working is complex and multilayered, but equally exciting and rewarding for those who embrace the opportunity that internationalisation promotes. Successful internationalisation is about making the effort, being open to new opportunities and engaging with new colleagues and institutions.

I recall my first trip overseas was layered with excitement, some unease (as I hadn't previously travelled widely), and some guilt - yes, I was being paid to travel to new countries and had the opportunity to see new things. But it's far from being a holiday.

International travel is tiring as you traverse multiple zones, the emails and Teams messages will continue to be sent (and they will start to flow as the UK day wakes up); and those modules and assessments will still need to be delivered or attended to.

UK HEI Internationalisation Strategies define 'institution to institution' priorities that look to forge to a range of bi-lateral agreements that support long rehearsed and well-developed opportunities of working together. From pure student

recruitment initiatives (attendance at fairs or working with agents) or through more managed collaborative arrangements that support student mobility (via franchise, validation or progression models of 2+1, 2+2, 3+1), or through dual or joint activity (that may involve flying faculty to the country). Additional opportunities and discussions often framed within an MoU may include staff exchange, the development of joint research initiatives; and increasingly online activity that supports hybrid models of delivery.

Simply put, international travel demonstrates a commitment from one institution to another; it is a positive act that indicates that we are interested in exploring the opportunity further and that we are prepared to invest time and expense. Importantly, it provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate a personal commitment that goes beyond the teams or zoom call, it places you 'in country' and into the market; it allows you a first-hand opportunity to experience the location from where your students may come from in due course.

The travel and weariness alone will not guarantee a successful outcome. Being successful is more than modelling a range of behaviours or demonstrating cultural awareness of a country.

Fundamentally successful and sustained institutional partnerships are founded on person-to-person relationships. Simply because as people, we like working with people who we like. Person to person contact establish trust and create solid foundations for further work to be built upon, these personal relationships strengthen the formal agreements and are the basis of a strong and successful partnership.

There is real stability and strength in the 'one to one' or 'person to person' relationship that goes beyond the institutional agreement and these are the pillars of a long and sustained partnership. The most successful international colleagues develop rich and meaningful relationships because they are interested in the person, their story and the relationships that can be developed between the individual colleagues themselves. In essence, they are a people person. But behind this characteristic they must be proactive and strategic in their thinking and approach, and equally they must be authentic and honest in their engagements with new colleagues; it is not forced or false.

Principally what they do well is they commit to the role and invest time and effort to the opportunity. They do this honestly and have an unfettered commitment to the relationship as they see the value for them as an individual, the opportunity for their university and importantly, the doors that will open to students.

“Fundamentally successful and sustained institutional partnerships are founded on person-to-person relationships. Simply because as people, we like working with people who we like.”



INVEST: energy and time to the role.

- Understand the market or region (what matters to them - league tables, research standing, subject innovation etc. Engage in networks (subject or country associations, sector level meetings, attend conferences that support TNE)
- International Office is vital / take time to get to know them
- In country staff / local knowledge is equally vital
- Invest time in the broader stakeholder landscape; follow the politics, seek out All Party Groups that support international works or subcommittees that influence TNE.

ENGAGE: in the opportunity fully and honestly.

- Getting to know your counterpart staff, do your own due diligence and research pre-trip planning and research is important,
- The opportunity of being in-country is huge. Post Covid return to in country visits - investment is worth it as you can explore the buildings and speak to people (no teams lens controls) and importantly, current students.
- Try to learn about the protocols and cultural expectations of the county and in meetings - use your international office and any in-country colleagues to advise and inform
- Try to get to know your partners strengths (institutional and personal) as common interests can help build a strong relationship.

ACT: quickly following the visit.

- Response is key. Follow up is a priority (during the visit and post visit).
- Active prolonged engagement is the goal, so regular action and communication is required.
- Networking and following up on meetings and engage the new contacts made.
- Speak to the people you meet, ask them where are they from? What are doing? How long have they worked at the institution? Do they have family?
- Use the opportunity to build your networks.
- Use your research and professional assets to help build the relationship. Share contact details and connect on LinkedIn and other channels.

WRITTEN BY
PROFESSOR DAVID MCGRVIE MA FHEA FRSA
Professor of Arts and Culture

PRO VICE CHANCELLOR (INTERNATIONAL) EXECUTIVE DEAN
*Faculty of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Chester*



Spotlight on Student Services

AS alumni, we often reminisce about our university days – those formative years filled with growth, learning, and countless memorable experiences. Yet, behind the scenes of our memories lies an essential pillar of support: Student Services. In this article we put a spotlight on Student Services and highlight the significant changes in this area, which reflect the changing student demographic and their diverse support needs.

Peer Support

One of the fundamental aspects of Student Services is the provision of support to student groups who may face additional challenges in the academic environment. Our Wellbeing and Mental Health team have launched a variety of Student Support Networks which are safe spaces for students who may have a shared background or are going through similar experiences to connect, support, and share tips and information with each other. We currently have the following networks: Student Parent Support Network, Student Menopause Network, Student LGBTQ+ Network and Men's Network. Alongside this our Student Experience team have established a range of support networks and specific support packages for students which include those who are care-experienced, estranged, and Carers, providing them with a University point of contact alongside other support such as additional financial support. Our work to support individuals who may face additional barriers to success whilst at University led to us becoming the second University in the UK to sign the Recovery Friendly University Pledge, which gives a commitment to welcoming and supporting students who are in Recovery.

The theme of peer support has been further developed through our investment in the training of our Wellbeing and Mental Health staff to become accredited to deliver Student

Minds Look After Your Mate sessions. This workshop empowers students to support friends experiencing mental health difficulties, whilst looking after their own wellbeing, thus extending the reach of our work into the student body.

Student Assistance Programme

Being mindful of the growing numbers of students who may require support outside of our usual office hours, such as those students who are studying on programmes which have placements and apprenticeship students, has led to us investing in a Student Assistance Programme. This has given our students access to 24/7 in-the-moment crisis support, along with legal, housing, financial, relationship and medical advice from qualified advisers, and the option to access structured counselling at a time of day which may better suit their needs. The service is supported by a language line with over 200 language options which is beneficial to our international student cohort. This complements the support offered by the University and provides students with additional free specialist advice and guidance.

Student Safety

Our Proctor's Office, who have responsibility for student safety, complaints, discipline and professional suitability procedures, have recently launched our Sexual Violence

Liaison Officer service, a specialised support service for students who have experienced sexual violence. The university now has a dedicated team of qualified sexual violence liaison officers (SVLOs) to support students who have experienced sexual harassment and/or violence either recently, or in the past. The SVLO Service also established a Northwest Sexual Violence Universities Networking group, inviting peers responsible for sexual violence related work from other local universities to come together and support best practice developments.

Financial Support

Our Your Money team were involved in a cross-university working group who were focused on supporting students through the Cost-of-Living crisis. The excellent work of the group was recognised through a nomination for a What Uni Student Choice Award. In addition to this, we recruited our

first university Student Money Adviser to offer support to students on several money related topics, and this team is due to expand soon with the recruitment of two further team members planned. The team also developed a referral service with debt charity StepChange to support students experiencing significant difficulties in managing debt, which has seen a number of students gaining the specialist support that they need.

Looking ahead

We have signed up to the Mental Health Charter, which involves taking a whole university approach to improving staff and student mental health. The Charter is composed of 18 themes. Within each of the themes, the Charter sets out a number of principles of good practice that universities can follow to embed a whole-university approach. We are hoping to present ourselves for the charter assessment in the next couple of years.

One to watch



RECENT graduate, Thomas Woodthorpe who studied Games Development BSc, tell us about his journey during his time at the University of Chester...

In my first year I was an active member of the Archery society, going to several competitions and attending Varsity / BUCS. I also started being a volunteer research assistant helping with a virtual reality project for helping children with dog phobias. In my first year I was able to get the Chester Difference Excellence Award. I was also able to use previous industry experience and completed assessments to progress from the first year to the third year of my course.

In my second year, I was the president of the Games Development society, teaching programming and games development lessons, assisting with society socials and running events and running the social media. The society was awarded Academic Society of the year at the Students Union Awards. I was also able to continue my volunteer research by assisting with research into how different types of audio affect user experience by creating the software for the research. I was also the Student Voice Rep for my course year which was a great experience as I was able to put forward different discussions about the course. During my second year I was the Faculty Voice Representative for Science, Business and Enterprise. As part of the role, I was able to present an award at the 1839 awards ceremony. I was also able to present my dissertation research at SURE (Showcase of Undergraduate Research Experiences). During my two years, I was able to get the Platinum+ Volunteering award for doing over 300 hours of volunteering. As part of that, I was very thankful to be able to be a guest speaker and did a presentation at the CDA and UCV celebration awards. The volunteering

and careers teams were both extremely supportive during my time at university which I am very thankful for. During my second year I was also a Grads in Games student representative.

As part of my Work Based Learning module in my second year I did enterprise work, creating a game in the Fortnite Ecosystem being able to become a Venture Finalist with the Venture Pitch. The Venture Program helped me develop entrepreneurial skills and experience which will help me for future enterprise projects.

The Universities academic and support teams have been extremely supportive and helpful with the different activities I have done during my two years which I am very grateful for.

In the future, I am planning on doing either a master's and or a PhD programme as I have really enjoyed helping with research during my undergraduate course and have been able to get some insight into how research works. I also plan on continuing my enterprise work from Work Based in my spare time as I have also enjoyed that.

ACH1EVE

/ə'tʃi:v/

verb

1. Successfully bring about or reach (a desired objective or result) by effort, skill or courage.

We believe that being a graduate of the University of Chester is a significant achievement, and we know that our alumni continue to achieve long after leaving University. We also recognise that our current students and staff are achieving more than ever before.

Whether you are still here in CH1, or have continued your Chester story beyond, at the heart of what you ACH1EVE is Chester.




University of
Chester

 @UoChesterAlumni

 @ChesterAlumni

 @ChesterAlumni

 University of Chester Alumni