

Annual Review 2023





"The challenging operating environment facing UK universities has only served to focus our attention even more on what really matters: our students."



Welcome to the University of Chester's *Annual Review* for the 2022/23 academic year.

In creating this year's *Review*, we have given a lot of thought to what makes us unique; how our origins as a faith institution have supported the creation of a genuinely multi-faith chaplaincy, and how our locations inform our modern and distinct approach to innovative teaching, learning, research and engagement.

As ever, the communities and places local to our University sites are central to all that we do, but an almost forty percent increase in the number of international students this year has challenged us to consider our role in an expanding global community, and the support we provide to those who've joined us from around the world.

Another key consideration this year – the challenging operating environment facing UK universities – has only served to focus our attention even more on what really matters: our students. This year's *Review* showcases some of the recognition we have received for our student offer, and for the opportunities our students have created and seized to engage meaningfully with the world around them, via our Citizen Student Strategy.

Sustainability, and the actions we take as an organisation and as individuals, to address the nature and climate emergencies, continue to be priorities. Our staff, students and communities have worked incredibly hard to embed these considerations into every aspect of our activity, including our daily operations and forward-looking research activities.

I hope you enjoy this year's *Review*, and look forward to welcoming you to one of our sites soon!

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



“Universities and their successes are primarily about their students, and ours have achieved an impressive range of accolades and awards this year, as well as undertaking a wide variety of extracurricular activities for the benefit of others”



Chancellor’s welcome

This year, how inspiring to see staff and students providing thoughtful leadership on challenging topics – including the nature and climate emergencies, mental health and wellbeing, and what our past can tell us about our future – in an open and inclusive way that engages our local, national and international communities and stakeholders.

All of us have a responsibility to engage in these efforts, including me! On our University of Chester-produced Commonwealth Poetry Podcast this year, the guests my daughter, Aphra, and I have welcomed include HRH The Duke of Kent, Baroness Floella Benjamin and Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP (and his cat, Attlee!). Through our discussions we have explored traditional Trinidadian folk songs, the incredible work of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, and personal connections with the animal kingdom.

Of course, universities and their successes are primarily about their students, and ours have achieved an impressive range of accolades and awards this year, as well as undertaking a wide variety of extracurricular activities for the benefit of others. Not only that, but a record-breaking number of students celebrated their graduation with us this year – my congratulations and warm wishes to all of our graduates as they move on to their next challenge.

On that note, all that’s left is for me to welcome you to this year’s *Annual Review*. There’s something here for everyone – businesses, prospective students, policy makers and higher education professionals – to connect with, so please do get involved.

Gyles Brandreth, Chancellor of the University of Chester

Research and Knowledge Exchange

It's been a busy year for us: the official launch of our Research and Knowledge Exchange Institutes (RKEIs) complements the reorganisation of our academic faculty structure to support our teaching and strategic plans, and has been strengthened by external funding and recognition across our areas of research and knowledge expertise.

With and for our communities

The RKEIs are a vital component of the RKE Strategy we launched last year, encouraging staff and students to collaborate with our communities and stakeholders, and to lead the way in addressing critical policy issues relating to: Culture and Society; Health and Wellbeing; and Sustainability and Environment. Activities include public events, support for early career researchers, and engagement with policy makers – keep an eye out for their programme of public events throughout the year.

Our mission continues to grow high quality activities that positively impact our communities whilst producing lasting social benefit. Our Digital on Tour bus has now visited c.100 schools and colleges to work with more than 4,500 young people, developing their digital skills and understanding of the important role digital technologies will play in their future education and employment. In Chester, we worked with local stakeholders on the High Street Heritage Action Zone (part of a national, funded project overseen by Heritage England) to breathe new life into our high street and, in Shrewsbury, we worked with the Churches Conservation Trust to address heritage crime at local landmark, St Mary's Church.

Many of our local stakeholders are also part of the thriving community of professionals and senior executives who are undertaking work-based research projects with us, as part of our professional doctorate programme.



(Inter)nationally significant research

Advances in research undertaken by our staff this year included: award-winning work to improve the engagement of ex-service personnel with primary healthcare services; the use of sensor electronics to improve the treatment of sleep disorder breathing; developing understanding of how small businesses are preparing themselves for the transition to Net Zero; exploring potential energy supplies via the electronic structure modelling of perovskite solar cells; and, a range of impactful research and knowledge exchange relating to social and environmental justice within our communities. Linked to this, and as part of its work with the UK's Industrial Decarbonisation Research and Innovation Centre (IDRIC), the University has published a nationally significant industrial decarbonisation workforce report, which will influence future sustainability skills policy.

Congratulations to our staff members who have secured notable external grants to build upon our excellent research and knowledge exchange; their projects include: the impact of hearing loss on military veterans (funded by the Royal British Legion); the use of cutting-edge simulation technology to improve the skills of our health and social care workers (with funding from Health Education England); and, a prestigious Leverhulme grant for the BATMAN project, which will advance understanding of bats' responses to human-induced environmental changes.

It's not just our staff who are leading the way. Sport and Exercise student, Ella Johnson, conducted research into the mental and physical demands of men's and women's referees whilst providing expertise in the Rugby League World Cup, and PhD student, Rosie Anderson, is researching the future of female athlete performance with Manchester City's women's team.

Towards Net Zero

Our commitment to addressing the nature and climate emergencies isn't just about headlines and annual events; we work consistently and tirelessly to deliver impact at the individual, institutional and partnership levels, and invite you to join us in our efforts.

University commitments

As an institution, we remain committed to achieving Net Zero for scope one and two emissions by 2030 (emissions from our electricity, gas and fuel consumption) and have implemented changes across our estate in support of this, including an external validation of our monitoring activities to ensure we can report accurately on progress. We have now certified 47 members of staff and 78 students on our Carbon Literacy training, empowering them to lead by example and cascade their skills and ideas throughout our wider communities.

We started the academic year with a Sustainable Travel Relaunch event, to promote the different ways that staff, students and visitors can travel to and between our sites. Our students set the agenda at our Sustainability Fair in November, with challenges including how to mend and reuse clothing, and Chester Youth Climate Action Network's 'Net Zero Home' initiative, which promotes changes students can make in their own homes. The Fair was attended by our local stakeholders and businesses – thank you for your support!

We recruited one of our graduates to develop the University's Transport Strategy, co-mentored by our Sustainability Manager and Cheshire West and Chester Council's Director of Transport and Highways. This resulted in the graduate being appointed to a role in the Council's Transport Directorate, leading on bus partnerships for the Borough – just one of the positive impacts that have emerged from our Partnership Agreement with Cheshire West and Cheshire Council.



Collaboration for change

We can't do it alone; our local and national partners are vital to achieving impact at scale. This year, in addition to our world-leading education offering with Chester Zoo, we worked in partnership with local arts centre, Storyhouse, to host a day of performances and discussions to inspire our local community to reduce their carbon footprint and protect the environment. The event delivered 35 sessions to more than 500 visitors, and we have been named a finalist in this year's Green Gown Awards as a result.

We worked with Warrington Council of Faiths and the environmental charity, Faiths4Change, on a free public event at our University Centre Warrington, exploring what faith-informed climate action might look like, and finding out more about the new Warrington Climate Emergency Strategy. In Chester, we worked with youth-led group, Chester National Park City, which is supported by Cheshire Wildlife Trust, to transform a plot of our land into a haven for wildlife. The group is working to connect urban communities to wildlife and their ambition is for Chester to join London and Adelaide as the only cities in the world with National Park City status.

Other collaborations have included University expertise and leadership contributions to the HyNet consortium and the Cheshire and Warrington Sustainable and Inclusive Growth Commission, both of which focused on bringing together key partners to achieve the subregion's ambition of becoming the most environmentally sustainable and inclusive in the UK – a particular challenge given the area's high emissions. In June the Chester Youth Climate Action Network delivered the second Green Expo Youth Conference, which engaged employers, further education colleges and local schools in debate and problem-solving. The focus for the day was how to tackle the climate and nature emergencies *and* the decarbonisation challenge simultaneously.

Building Social Capital

We want to find new and creative ways to 'open doors' for our students, so that they have the connections to create and seize opportunities for their personal, academic and career development.

Connections for University success...

Ensuring that our students' learning experiences relate closely to the world of work has really paid off this year. International Tourism Management student, Annabelle Whitaker, won a national award following her Work-Based Learning placement with Chester Zoo, and our Photography and Fine Art students made use of their connection with Cheshire West and Chester Council to utilise temporarily unoccupied high street units as gallery spaces for their work.

Taking an international approach to business start-up, 7 of our entrepreneurial students won places on a once-in-a-lifetime adventure in Thailand via the Santander Universities UK initiative. The 10-day trip included a visit to Bangkok University to share their ideas with the Dean of the School of Entrepreneurship, and a tour of Bangkok's The Hive, a co-working space for entrepreneurs.

...and beyond!

We love to hear how our alumni are getting on. This year Masters of Art in Design graduate, Emma Rose Atherton, was one of 8 designers chosen to create a carbon-neutral womenswear collection, which was showcased to King Charles III when it was launched by The Prince's Foundation and world-leading fashion retailer, YOOX NET-A-PORTER.

Having won the 2017 Santander Enterprise Challenge in his first year, Business Management with Marketing graduate, Hamza Hussain, has this year launched his own business, offering a gluten-free and vegan authentic Indian curry sauce base. His advice to our students? "Never be afraid to go out of your comfort zone".

Entrepreneur of the year!



Students from the University's Business School represented the North West at the Young Enterprise (YE) UK Start-Up Final in May 2023 with their business, A Wild Life. The team was presented with the award for Best Pitch Deck and team member Eleanor Jones was awarded the title of Student Entrepreneur of the Year, which recognises a student who has developed significantly as a result of the start-up journey.

Anne, Princess Royal, spoke with great interest to the team (Eleanor Jones; Josh Sellings; Aaron Jones; Demi Evans, and Jade McArdle) about their eco-friendly business which was developed as part of Chester Business School's Entrepreneurial Thought in Action module. Eleanor explains, "as I do most of my shopping online, I was aware of the amount of packaging that I was receiving. With the desire to become more environmentally friendly, I developed the idea of sustainable packaging which integrates cardboard with flower or vegetable seeds. This allows consumers to offset their carbon footprint by planting their packaging, allowing new life to grow. I am part of a fantastic team, with each member contributing their own attributes and skills to the project which has brought this idea to fruition".

Jade McArdle, Managing Director of A Wild Life, said: "Our young enterprise journey has been incredible. It has taught me so many personal and professional skills that I can take forward with me. Meeting HRH Princess Anne and explaining our business to her was an amazing experience that I am very proud of."



August



Catering Services won a national sustainability award.

November



Social Work programmes based at our University Centre Warrington won University of the Year in the annual Social Worker of the Year Awards.

Publication of our nationally significant report on workforce solutions to accelerate industrial decarbonisation in the UK.

2022

September



Chester Business School shortlisted for Business School of the Year by Times Higher Education Awards.

National Knowledge Exchange Framework highlighted the impact of our work with local businesses and our commitment to public and community engagement.

December



Launch of first-of-its-kind education course focused entirely on wildlife conservation and sustainability education, in partnership with Chester Zoo.

Highlights of the Year

March



Launch of our Health and Wellbeing Research and Knowledge Exchange Institute, which will address critical policy issues.

May



Double win at the Student Nursing Times Awards: Best Student Experience and Student Placement of the Year (Community).

April



Joint highest number of nominations of any institution in this year's Whatuni Student Choice Awards (WUSCAs) and announced as among the best five for: University of the Year; Lecturers and Teaching Quality; University Halls; Postgraduate experience and Cost of Living Support.

Launch of our Levelling Up Impact Report in partnership with the Purpose Coalition, led by the Rt Hon Justine Greening.

June



Top ten position in the Uni Compare University Rankings 2023 for the quality of our courses.

2023

Holistic Student Experience

The additional support and activities we offer are often what make the difference and our staff, stakeholders and communities all contribute to ensuring that our citizen students have access to opportunities beyond teaching and research.

The right help at the right time

This year we were recognised for our sector-leading student communications: our Student Shout Out newsletter reached the finals of the Heist awards (showcasing the best in marketing from across the sector), in the category of Best Student or Alumni Engagement Initiative. Following its initial success, Shout Out has been expanded to serve the distinct needs of our UK and international students and graduates. Also recognised this year were our efforts to enhance student safety across all our sites, including our Safe Spaces initiative at University Centre Reaseheath.

Our Volunteering and Mentoring team worked with our students to support local communities. Activities undertaken during Give Back Month included food and clothing donations to West Cheshire Foodbank and Chester Aid to the Homeless (CATH), and help with conservation volunteering group, TCV (The Conservation Volunteers), to lay hedges at the Countess of Chester Country Park.

Citizen students leading the way

This year, students from our innovative creative health placement (developed in response to the NHS Long Term Plan 2019) formed a choir to explore the mental health benefits of singing. Activity included music therapy sessions with performance company, Making Maestros, and a performance at local arts centre, Storyhouse.

Zoology student, Lyndon Howson, delivered an inspirational speech to thousands of young people at Buckingham Palace to recognise their achievements in The Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) Award. Lyndon credits the DofE for motivating him while battling cancer and for encouraging him to stand for his local council, as well as running marathons for charity.

Award winning community outreach



Chester Law School students and Student Project Managers, Bradley Bennett and Annabel Priest, were recognised this year for their work on the Immigration Project, winning Best Contribution by a Team of Students in the 2023 LawWorks and Attorney General's Student Pro Bono Awards.

The Awards, presented at the House of Commons, celebrate the best pro bono activities - legal advice or representation provided free of charge in the public interest - undertaken by UK Law students and Law schools.

Bradley and Annabel worked with and were mentored by Simon Clark, Senior Immigration Caseworker at Eastgate Chambers – a firm committed to improving the lives of refugees. The Immigration Project involved life-changing work assisting refugee clients (over 80% of whom have been forced from their homes by the war in Syria), with Bradley and Annabel's team supporting the drafting of applications and providing advice and guidance. This work helps to ensure refugees access the assistance they need – leading to a quicker decision on their future – and is also such a valuable experience for our Citizen Students: "It is an incredibly insightful and rewarding experience to be a part of" (*Bradley*), and, "it is fantastic that all of the hard work that we all put in to giving back to our community, alongside our own personal commitments, is being acknowledged" (*Annabel*).

The University of Chester Law School operates several student-run community outreach projects like the Immigration Project, all part of the Chester Community Law Project (CCLP). Each is led by student project managers and operated by student volunteers from the undergraduate Law degree.

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is something we reconsider every year, in recognition of evolving challenges and opportunities and the fact that a wide variety of learning and skills development options is such an empowering tool to enable individuals to grow and change their circumstances.

Don't let anything stop you

So many of our students proved that it is possible to find a learning pathway that fits around life's many complexities. Stacey Davidson, 41, worked as a Modern Slavery Case Worker while completing her MA in Social Work at our University Centre Warrington, alongside raising a young family and caring for her terminally ill father. After leaving school at 14 and despite recent health challenges, 77-year old Bryan Lewis achieved a BA in Photography and a MA in Fine Art - the culmination of eight years' part-time study: "My world was falling apart. The University of Chester gave me something to look forward to."

Crucially, we aren't just here for university-ready students: Jess Denson, 25, graduated with a first-class degree in Early Years Practice after struggling with dyslexia, but her journey with us started at Foundation level alongside work.

Evolving with the workplace

University isn't just about getting a great start in life – our staff work closely with employers to ensure that working professionals can access the skills they need throughout their careers, and that those skills reflect the reality of the workplace. This year, our School of Education created an optional learning pathway in Inclusion, Diversity and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as part of the BA (Hons) Education. The practical course includes work placements and focuses on developing students' understanding of how the sociology and psychology of education relate to real life practice.

Chester Business School's Work Based Integrative Studies (WBIS) programme supports employed students; successes this year included Dental Hygienist, Danielle Shaw, who gained a Postgraduate Diploma in Education of Dental Professionals via distance learning, in support of her career ambition of teaching other professionals.

Supporting international students



International student, Rindai Nyemba, who graduated this year with a MA in Social Work, relocated from Zimbabwe with her family to West Yorkshire and commuted to University Centre Warrington to pursue her career goals. Despite her commute and family commitments, Rindai still found the time to establish and run a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) social work student support group, to work through challenges and offer each other advice and friendship – something that is such an important part of a meaningful and successful student experience.

Rindai produced a report on the group's activities and, after discovering challenges specific to international students, she met with Social Work England (the profession's regulatory body) and the British Association of Social Workers to raise awareness and address the barriers that may prevent international students from engaging and/or succeeding in lifelong learning opportunities.

For Rindai, "my Master's degree has opened several doors of opportunity. From the day I interviewed for the place to study for my Master's, to the day I received my final transcript in the mail, I was supported by my lecturers, tutors and other departments within the University. They answered my questions and provided guidance that I deemed crucial for an international student".

Rindai impressed her work placement provider so much, they have since sought the required work permit to enable them to employ her.

Our University

Our University in 2022/23

- 2,509 staff (1,678 FTE)
- 8,455 undergraduate students
- 5,485 postgraduate students
- 2,500 students at partner institutions
- 107,162 alumni
- 9,902 hours of volunteering

Our new academic structure:

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

- Chester School of Education
- School for the Creative Industries
- School of Humanities and Social Sciences
- School of Law and Social Justice

Faculty of Health, Medicine and Society

- Chester Medical School
- School of Nursing and Midwifery
- School of Allied and Public Health
- School of Society

Faculty of Science, Business and Enterprise

- Chester Business School
- School of Natural Sciences
- School of Computing and Engineering Sciences

Finances

Our annual accounts can be viewed at:

<https://www1.chester.ac.uk/about-university/reports-and-policies/financial-statements>



Our locations

Chester



Exton Park



Queens Park



Riverside



Kingsway

University Centres

Birkenhead



Reaseheath



Shrewsbury



Warrington





“if there’s one thing I would hope you’d gain from this year’s Review, it is that you may feel inspired enough to follow up on something you’ve read”



Final word from the President of University Council

Having spent my whole career, of over 45 years, in further and higher education, including 15 years leading one of our local further education colleges, I have been part of many changes to our education sector. As part of the University’s governance, I see up close the challenges we have to face, but I know that the best thing about our sector is that we are always looking forward – asking what can we do better; how are the needs of our students evolving and are we keeping pace; and, are we leading the way in addressing local, national and global challenges.

Our multiple locations and foundations within the Christian faith provide the University of Chester with a unique perspective and sense of responsibility. These are evident in the fantastic progress we are making towards our vision for Chester Medical School, which will help to address the workforce crisis facing our NHS. Our partnerships with local leaders continue to strengthen, making our efforts to tackle the nature and climate emergencies increasingly effective. I am also very much looking forward to the Chester Festival of Ideas that is planned for July 2024 – a series of free public events with some high-profile speakers.

Finally, if there’s one thing I would hope you’d gain from this year’s Review, it is that you may feel inspired enough to follow up on something you’ve read – join us at one of our discussions or events; reach out to tell us how you think we could work together; or, tell us if you know of an opportunity that would benefit our wonderful students – and help us to make 2023/24 even better than 2022/23.


Meredydd David

OBE, DL, DSc, MPhil, FRAgS

Contact Us



If you're keen to learn more about us or think you or your organisation could support any of the work we've highlighted in this year's *Review*, please get in touch:

 communications@chester.ac.uk

Want to find out how you or your business could work with our students or graduates? Contact our Employer Engagement team:

 employers@chester.ac.uk





When it comes to the environment, we know that we can always do more – please do reach out if you'd like to work with us towards our sustainability goals:

 greenchester@chester.ac.uk



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University of
Chester

Parkgate Road, Chester CH1 4BJ
Tel: 01244 511000
Email: enquiries@chester.ac.uk
www.chester.ac.uk