

In June, the Department's trip to Iceland ran for the second time. This trip is associated with a 3rd year module entitled: 'Glaciology and Volcanism in Iceland' and is a fantastic and unique opportunity to study the landscape of this fascinating country.



Environment matters

The newsletter for Environment students and applicants

September 2014

www.york.ac.uk/environment

Students using lichenometry to explore rates of retreat of the glacier Gigjökull.

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Welcome

After the long summer, teaching begins again in the Environment Department in September. It has been a busy and exciting few months for the Department. Lots of our staff have been away over the summer, carrying out research and attending international conferences. As the new term approaches, we also welcome several new members of staff (see page 2) and we have more good news to report from the 2014 NSS survey.

I am delighted to see that 97% of York Environment students reported that they are satisfied with their course in the National Students Survey. We are constantly striving to improve the student experience and we have just appointed an Industry Liaison Officer to develop student placement opportunities and further strengthen the career prospects of our students. From 2015, the Environment Department and our students will move to the brand new £12.5million Environment Hub.

Professor Colin Brown
Head of Environment Department

National Student Survey Results

The 2014 National Student Survey (NSS) has recently published its findings, and there is some excellent news for the Environment Department. 97% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the quality of their course – that's up by 2% on our results of last year. In addition, there are plenty of other indicators in the survey that students in the Environment Department are increasingly happy with their experience in York. For example, students are increasingly happy with:

- The way staff explain things (98%).
- The fact that their degree improves their communication skills (88%).
- The clarity of assessment criteria (93%).
- The fairness of our marking (88%).
- Accessibility of IT resources (91%).

Overall, these are very encouraging scores, and are a great indication of the high-quality learning experience available to students in the Environment Department in York.



Mekong River survey

Dr. Murray Rudd and Ruby Grantham (a 2013 graduate from the Environment, Economics and Ecology programme) were in Vientiane, Lao, in August to run a workshop for the Mekong River Commission (MRC).

The workshop's focus was to formulate questions for an upcoming survey of 1200 households in Lao, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, to assess the socio-economic impacts and social implications from reduced capture fisheries in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB).

Some 40+ million people live in rural areas within the LMB and many depend on fish and fishing for their livelihoods. The MRC survey, which Dr. Rudd is designing, will collect information that can help assess how dependent local people are on the fish resource of the Mekong. The Mekong is under tremendous threat due to environmental change, upland land development, and hydroelectric dam development.

The Saturday morning market in Vientiane; all the produce in the picture was grown in riverside gardens along the Mekong and is also at risk from changes in water flow patterns in the LMB.

New arrivals

We are very happy to be able to welcome several new staff members to the Environment Department. Dr Karen Thorpe is a new Senior Lecturer in Environmental Science, with research interests in understanding the influence of environmental contaminants on the physiology, reproductive and immune health of aquatic vertebrates. Dr Jon Hill is a new Lecturer in Physical Geography, with interests that include assessing the tsunami hazard to the UK from submarine slides in the Arctic, and examining the environmental impact of wave and tidal energy devices. Dr Dean Waters is a new Teaching Fellow in Quantitative Ecology. Victor Tsemo is a new Teaching Fellow in Business and Environmental Policy. Dr Nancy Baines also joined us in August 2014 as our new Industry Liaison Officer. She will be working on fostering links with external organisations to set up internships and longer term placements for the benefit of our students.

Finally, Jacqueline Woodall is a new Administrative Assistant and will be the main point of contact for new students.

All these new appointments reflect the success and dynamism of the Environment Department as it grows from strength to strength.

Spreading the word

Professor Mark Hodson was invited to speak at two prestigious conferences over the summer. In August he was in Paris speaking about his team's research into how earthworms affect the soil in which they live. Closer to home Mark was invited to speak at a meeting held at the Diamond Light Source near Oxford, the UK's most expensive scientific machine (more than £400 million spent so far). Mark talked about how he is using equipment at Diamond to learn how to synthesise novel materials by studying biominerals - minerals produced by living organisms.



Building update

The new Environment Building moves a stage closer to completion this month with the start of building works on site by contractor Morgan Sindal. The building will house the Environment Department, the Stockholm Environment Institute York, the York Environmental Sustainability Institute and BioArCh, a research group covering aspects of Biology, Archaeology and Chemistry. Work on clearing the site, where Wentworth College E block once stood on Campus West, was completed on schedule in July, and construction works commenced week beginning 25th August 2014. The project is on target to be handed over to the University at the beginning of August 2015 ready for the new academic year in October 2015.

The images above show what the building will look like inside and out, and more images and videos are available at: <http://tinyurl.com/q5xc8k3>

Danish summer school

Dr Roman Ashauer has spent much of the summer in Denmark, teaching at a summer school on Dynamic Modelling of Toxic effects. More information can be found at: www.debtox.info/dynmodtox2014.php

New research funding

Charlie Burns has recently been awarded £224,372 by the Leverhulme Trust for her project 'Evaluating the Impact of Austerity upon Environmental Policy in Europe'. The project will run for three years and will bring a new member of staff, Paul Tobin, into the department as a post-doctoral researcher, and a new PhD student Jan-Justus Andreas. Together they will investigate whether austerity has affected environmental policy at the EU level and within three European countries.

Julia Touza and Piran White have been awarded £427,245 for a project entitled: 'Risks of animal and plant infectious diseases through trade'. The project will run for three years, and the broad aim is to develop enhanced methods for assessing the animal and plant infectious disease risks posed by changes in world trade networks.

Finally, Roman Ashauer has been awarded £250,000 by Unilever for a project entitled: 'Ecotoxicological Effect Modelling'. The aim of this work is to develop ecological models to support risk-based decision making in relation to down-the-drain chemicals.