

2026 EDITION

# FOREVER SURREY

The magazine for alumni, supporters and friends



The past,  
present,  
and future of  
space at Surrey

From student engineer to NASA leader:  
Nicky Fox's Surrey story written among the stars

Scholar Gabriella on a  
new path thanks to the  
**Ted Adams Trust**



Celebrating **90 years**  
of the Guildford School  
of Acting





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## Forever Surrey

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## Surrey Alumni Team

Advancement, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH

# Welcome from Surrey's new President and Vice-Chancellor



Professor Stephen Jarvis

## I'm delighted to welcome you to this edition of *Forever Surrey*, my first as President and Vice-Chancellor.

Since I began the role in September, I have been overwhelmed by the warmth of the reception I have received from Surrey students, staff and alumni.

This strong sense of community was one of the many reasons I chose to join the University and, with your help, it's one that I am determined to foster.

I am very much looking forward to what we can achieve together and hope to meet as many of you as possible at future events.

Through my previous roles – most recently as Provost and Vice-Principal at the University of Birmingham – I am acutely aware of just how crucial a thriving alumni community is to the health and success of a university.

This truly global outlook and reach benefits us all, which is why staying in touch with our talented graduates and having your support is so integral to the success of our goal of becoming a world-leading institution.

I know that nurturing our Surrey community was a priority for my predecessor, Professor Max Lu, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for the immense contribution he made, growing our family to 153,000 alumni in 185 countries.

These are exciting times as the University makes progress in implementing its new strategy.

A little later in the academic year we will formally

launch the Surrey Space Institute, which builds on our impressive track record of innovation in space technology.

This is a significant step towards our aim of delivering transformative research and innovation and enhances our reputation for world-leading research and teaching excellence, both globally and in the UK. Progress has been recognised by two key rankings in the 2024/25 academic year: Surrey was among the top four fastest-rising universities in the UK in the QS World University Rankings and retained its place in the top 15 of the National Student Survey for a fourth consecutive year.

This wasn't the only cause for celebration. Last February, 'The Future Says Surrey', our ambitious fundraising campaign, closed having raised more than £70.3 million in just three years to fund transformational research and support talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This success is a triumph for our whole community, and I'd like to thank everyone who contributed in some way.

We are indebted to your continued support and, as I read through the following pages of the magazine, it's clear that your ongoing engagement with Surrey is part of what makes this University so special.

**Professor Stephen Jarvis**  
President and Vice-Chancellor

# The Future Says Surrey

A campaign of impact, innovation, and generosity

In 2021, the University of Surrey launched its first-ever philanthropic campaign, **The Future Says Surrey**, with a bold aim: to raise £60 million in three years to drive research, widen educational access, and build a healthier, more sustainable world.

Three years later, the campaign closed at £70.3 million, surpassing expectations and delivering impact across science, education, and society.



## Championing biodiversity

The Space4Nature project harnesses satellite technology, AI, and citizen science to tackle biodiversity loss. With 1,500 volunteers, it has restored 50+ hectares of pollinator habitats and engaged hundreds in conservation. Backed by the Garfield Weston Foundation and the People's Postcode Lottery, the initiative also educates young people through the Surrey Wildlife Trust's *Wilder Schools* programme, with ambitions to scale globally.



The University of Surrey was awarded the Best of CASE Europe Region Award for 'The Future Says Surrey' philanthropic campaign, after raising £70.3m to fuel research and student support.

## AI for accessibility

An AI-powered innovation created by Signapse (a Surrey spin-out company) and funded by Google.org's AI for the Global Goals Impact Challenge, makes sign language more accessible by translating spoken and written English into British Sign Language.

## Supporting students

More than 40 new scholarships have opened doors for students facing financial and social barriers. The Forever Surrey Fund, meanwhile, has provided emergency support to 450+ students during the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.



## Bringing science to the public

Led by Professor Jim Al-Khalili and funded by The John Templeton Foundation, Surrey's *Arrow of Time* project blends physics, quantum biology, and philosophy to explore why time flows forward. Beyond academia, it drew 700 attendees at the Cheltenham Science Festival, inspired millions through BBC Radio 4, and sparked curiosity in schools nationwide.

## Building the doctors of tomorrow

In 2024, Surrey opened its new School of Medicine to address the UK's pressing healthcare needs. Thanks to the generosity of Sam Dawson (BSc Biochemistry, 1978), and her husband John, full scholarships are already supporting aspiring doctors like Ellie-Mae, who says, "To have people believe in me is the most powerful motivator."



## Researching global health

Vaccinology has been another major focus. Led by Professor Christine Rollier, PhD students are tackling urgent challenges such as vaccine responses in the elderly and developing E.coli vaccines for both humans and animals – vital work against microbial resistance. Supported by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through The Pirbright Institute, the Braithwaite Family Foundation and the Equal Opportunities Foundation, this research exemplifies the collaborative effort driving innovation in global health. Similarly, the *Well Foeal Study*, supported by the Alborada Trust, reflects Surrey's *One Health*, *One Medicine* ethos, linking animal and human health by studying the role of gut health in young horses.

## A lasting legacy

From restoring pollinator habitats to pioneering vaccinology, from scholarships to science festivals, *The Future Says Surrey* has changed lives and created new futures. It is more than a fundraising triumph: it is proof of what a collective vision can achieve.

By exceeding its £60 million target, the campaign has united alumni, students, researchers, and partners in shaping a brighter, more inclusive world.

TheFutureSaysSurrey

# Surrey in numbers

## Students & graduates



## Economic impact & industry reach



The Surrey Research Park hosts **175 companies**, employs approximately **4,500 staff**, and contributes **£500 million** annually to the UK economy

## Student satisfaction & employability



\*Figures accurate as of December 2025

# Surrey's rise in the rankings



**22nd** in the **Daily Mail University Guide 2026**

**19th** in the **Complete University Guide 2026**

**31st** in **The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2026**

Leading in the UK in **Food Science and Information Technology & Systems** (Complete University Guide) and **Drama, Music, and Nutrition & dietetics** (Daily Mail)



Ranking in the top five nationally for **Language & Linguistics** (Guardian), **Drama Dance & Cinematics, Paramedic Science** (Complete University Guide), **Food Science, Hospitality Leisure Recreation & Tourism, Veterinary Medicine** (Times), **English Literature, Mechanical Engineering, Tourism, Biosciences, Materials, Mathematical Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine** (Daily Mail)

**Top 9%** Ranked among the top 9% globally in the **Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025**

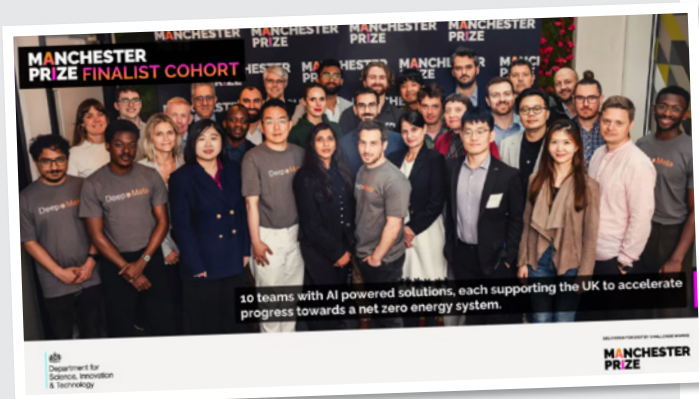
**Top 5%** Ranked among the top 5% globally in the **QS World University Rankings 2026**



**113th worldwide** in the **QS Sustainability rankings 2026**



## University of Surrey startup BiofuelAI shortlisted for £1m Manchester Prize



A University of Surrey spin-out, BiofuelAI, is one of ten finalists for the Manchester Prize – a UK government award backing AI for public good. The company will receive £100,000 and join a ten-month accelerator, with a chance to win £1 million in 2026.

BiofuelAI's platform uses AI to optimise anaerobic digesters that turn organic waste into renewable biogas. By predicting how different feedstocks will react, it helps operators boost gas yields by up to 20%, cut greenhouse-gas emissions and increase profits.

Working with partners including Future Biogas, ENGIE and Nephin Renewables, the technology supports the UK's Net Zero goals by improving clean-energy production and reducing methane emissions from waste.

## Funding boost for childhood cancer research



Drs Esposito & Meira

Surrey researchers have secured over £250,000 from The Children & Young People's Cancer Association and The Little Princess Trust to study paediatric acute myeloid leukaemia (AML), a rare but aggressive cancer with low survival and frequent relapses.

Led by Dr Maria Teresa Esposito and Dr Lisiane Meira, the team will investigate the SET gene, often overexpressed in AML and linked to poorer outcomes. Blocking SET halts the growth of leukaemic cells, suggesting new treatment potential.

Current AML therapies are highly toxic, often causing severe long-term effects and high mortality. The project aims to develop safer, targeted drugs that spare the immune system while improving survival. Dr Meira said the funding allows growth of their research team and urgent exploration of alternatives, aiming for therapies that both save lives and protect survivors' quality of life.

## Surrey joins £14m hub to turn waste into valuable products

The University of Surrey is a partner in the £14 million Carbon-Loop Sustainable Biomufacturing Hub (C-Loop), which will transform industrial waste into valuable products while cutting emissions.

Supported by UKRI, C-Loop uses microbes to convert carbon-rich waste into medicines, cosmetics and bio-based chemicals. Surrey's role, led by Professor Jhuma Sadhukhan, is to develop a digital system combining AI with sustainability tools to monitor and optimise resource use.

Professor Sadhukhan calls it a "moonshot" to make sustainability a design driver, embedding intelligence into industrial systems to reduce waste.

The hub will also feature the UK's first BioFactory, a facility scaling up waste reuse, diverting landfill, and supporting circular manufacturing. With over 40 industry partners, C-Loop aims to accelerate adoption of sustainable processes and help shape greener industrial policy.



Professor Sadhukhan



## Surrey researchers teach robots a human-like grip

Engineers at Surrey's School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering have created a method that helps robots safely handle fragile or slippery objects, published in *Nature Machine Intelligence*.

The predictive control system enables robots to sense when items may slip and adjust movements instantly. Unlike conventional methods that only tighten grip, the approach mimics human reflexes – slowing, tilting, or repositioning to prevent a fall.

Dr Amir Ghalamzan explained that like people adjusting a slipping plate, robots can modify their actions automatically. The technology uses a tactile forward model to anticipate slip before it happens, analysing grip forces alongside planned motion. In trials, it performed reliably even with unfamiliar objects and tasks, proving real-world potential. This advance could improve automation in manufacturing, logistics and healthcare, ensuring safer, more adaptable robotic handling.

## Mathematical model reveals secrets of sleep patterns

Surrey's School of Maths & Physics and Surrey Sleep Research Centre have developed a model that explains how two internal rhythms and the light-dark cycle shape human sleep patterns.

The first rhythm, sleep pressure, reflects how long we've been awake or asleep. The second, the circadian rhythm – a near-24-hour biological clock – interacts with the external light environment.

The model shows how physiology, light and daily routine interact to explain phenomena like patterns of sleep in babies and older people, and late-sleeping teenagers. Merging brain science with real-world data, it simulates sleep behaviours across lifestyles and health conditions.

Author Professor Anne Skeldon said the model will inform personalised advice for sleep problems. Published in *Nature Partner Journal Biological Timing and Sleep*, it is a step towards practical, effective interventions to improve sleep.



## A new chapter in Surrey space leadership

**Surrey Space Institute launches to fuel the next era of space innovation and tackle urgent global challenges.**

The University has unveiled the Surrey Space Institute, a bold initiative to transform its celebrated history in small-satellite innovation into actionable missions addressing climate change, resilient infrastructure, and sustainable exploration.

### Heritage of innovation: a 45-year legacy

For more than four decades, Surrey has been synonymous with small-satellite breakthroughs. It all began in the 1970s under Sir Martin Sweeting at Surrey Space Centre, where teams built early reprogrammable satellites on B&Q tables and kitchen benches, leading to the pioneering UoSAT series and the foundation of Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd (SSTL) in 1985.

SSTL went on to shape the global small-satellite industry and deliver over £1 billion in export revenue.



“By uniting Surrey’s 45-year leadership in small satellites with cutting edge AI and cyber resilience, the Surrey Space Institute will give the UK the decisive capability it needs.”

Professor Adam Amara

### Building missions that matter

The Institute will be launched under the leadership of astrophysicist and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor Bob Nichol, with Professor Adam Amara – Chief Scientist at the UK Space Agency – appointed as inaugural Director.

“Space is no longer a frontier activity,” says Amara, “It is already a critical infrastructure underpinning everything from climate security to high speed connectivity. By uniting Surrey’s 45-year leadership in small satellites with cutting-edge AI and cyber resilience, the Surrey Space Institute will give the UK the decisive capability it needs”.

The Institute’s vision is to lead in full-life cycle mission development, from prototype and policy to launch and operation, focusing initially on three core areas: using space to solve water-related problems on Earth, ensuring the resilience of space infrastructure, and advancing deep-space exploration.

### Meeting international skills needs

The Institute will align with key priorities in the UK’s Industrial Strategy, bolstering a sector now worth £19 billion, with 52,000 skilled roles and £1 billion invested annually in R&D. Yet, over half of UK space organisations (and many from abroad) report critical skills shortages, particularly in software, AI, data analytics, and systems engineering.

To meet this challenge, the Institute aims to train 10% of the UK’s next-generation space workforce via postgraduate degrees, professional training, and hands-on missions such as the JUPITER project and SpaceCraft initiative.

### Training, technology & talent

The Institute will equip students with the specialised knowledge and mission-critical skills to deliver the next generation of space systems, spanning satellite technology, climate and environmental monitoring, space policy, AI, cybersecurity, and commercial applications such as space tourism.

### Why it matters to alumni

- **Legacy and leadership:** the Institute will honour the academic excellence and innovation alumni helped build and propel it into a bold future of mission-driven work.
- **Career pathways:** through the Institute, Surrey alumni will be able to engage as mentors, partners, or collaborators, enriching postgraduate training and entrepreneurial ventures.
- **Global impact:** the Institute’s projects will offer alumni a chance to support research, helping to solve pressing global challenges: climate adaptation, resilient sustainability, space governance - on the ground and in orbit.

### Looking ahead: from campus to cosmos

Surrey Space Institute marks a significant evolution – from pioneering lab experiments to an integrated, mission-capable powerhouse blending research, policy and enterprise. Beneath the gleam of its high-tech facilities lies a deep commitment: to serve society, strengthen national and international capabilities and inspire pathways to the Moon and beyond.

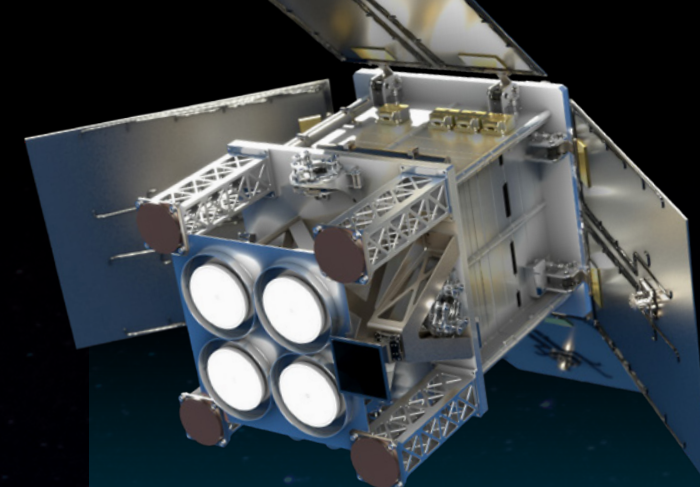
There’s never been a more thrilling time to join the University’s legacy in space. If you’d like to support the Institute, please get in touch:

[alumni@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@surrey.ac.uk)

### Voices from the launch

**Sir Martin Sweeting** reflects on the Institute with pride:

“When we began work on small satellites more than four decades ago, few believed they could have any serious impact. Today, the Surrey Space Institute is an exciting new chapter, working across disciplines and systems that are sustainable, inclusive and ready for global deployment.”



## Quick facts at a glance



### Scheduled launch

Early 2026



### Sector value

UK space economy worth **£19 billion**, supporting **52,000** roles



### Exports

Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd has generated **£1 billion** in satellite exports



### Tomorrow’s workforce

To train **10%** of the UK’s incoming space workforce



### Priority mission areas

**Water on Earth**

**Resilient satellite infrastructure** (cyber, comms, debris)

**Deep space exploration** (legal frameworks and protecting people)



# Alumni Spotlight



**Dr Nicky Fox, MSc Telematics & Satellite Engineering, 1991. Associate Administrator, NASA**

A leading figure in global space science, Nicky is Associate Administrator for NASA's Science Mission Directorate, overseeing more than 100 missions, from Earth-observing satellites to interplanetary explorers, with a budget of over \$7 billion.

- During her time at Surrey, Nicky gained early hands-on experience with satellite technology – including CubeSats – that ignited her lifelong passion for space science.
- After graduating, she advanced through roles at NASA and the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab, where she led the historic **Parker Solar Probe**, the first spacecraft to touch the Sun.
- In 2023, she was appointed to lead NASA's science division, becoming one of the most senior British-born officials in the agency's history.

Nicky is a dedicated mentor and STEM advocate, frequently speaking at global forums and inspiring young scientists to pursue careers in space, appearing on the BBC's *The Sky at Night* and *Desert Island Discs*.

“

At Surrey, I asked to see a CubeSat in the lab. It was exciting to be that close to something going into space. That group thinking to achieve solutions – without someone who knows the answer in the room – is what I do at NASA. ”

Her journey from Surrey lab to NASA leadership embodies the far-reaching impact of Surrey's mission-ready training in space science and engineering.

# Alumni Spotlight



**Abbie Hutty, MEng Mechanical Engineering, 2010. Chief Engineer, ispace Europe**

Abbie is a globally recognised spacecraft engineer whose journey from our MEng degree to lead lunar and Mars rover missions exemplifies Surrey's impact.

- While still a student, Abbie interned at Surrey Satellite Technology – an experience that launched her career in space tech.
- After graduation, she joined Astrium, now Airbus Defence and Space, rising to become Lead Structures and then Systems Engineer on the ExoMars Rover project, Europe's first rover mission to Mars.
- In 2016, at just 29, she became the youngest ever Fellow of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers.
- Today, Abbie serves as Chief Engineer at ispace Europe, leading development of lunar-rover missions as part of future Moon exploration.

Abbie is also a SurreyLeader and respected STEM ambassador, and has delivered TEDx talks, as well as appearing on BBC's *The Sky at Night*. Additionally, she speaks at schools and UN conferences to inspire future engineers.

“

I hope that anyone following a similar journey in my field will find that the path has been smoothed by people like me. ”

## What is SurreyLeaders?

SurreyLeaders is an exclusive alumni network celebrating graduates who are shaping the future through leadership, innovation and service. Members support the University by mentoring, volunteering, and driving global engagement.

Discover more: [surrey.ac.uk/surrey-leaders](https://surrey.ac.uk/surrey-leaders)



# Celebrating one year of Surrey's School of Medicine

Just over a year ago, the University of Surrey welcomed its first medical students, a landmark moment for both the institution and healthcare in the region. At the forefront is Professor Juliet Wright, a Surrey alumna, clinician, educator, and researcher with a career dedicated to advancing medical education and patient care. Previously at Brighton and Sussex Medical School, she spearheaded initiatives such as the award-winning *Time for Dementia* programme. Now, at Surrey, she is building a medical school that is innovative, student-focused, and closely connected to its community.



Professor Juliet Wright

“

A high proportion of graduates tend to remain where they train, and we want to grow our own school of excellence here. ”

Professor Juliet Wright

Reflecting on the first year, Professor Wright describes the journey as both challenging and rewarding. Students have embraced the course enthusiastically, achieved excellent exam results, and given strong feedback on their learning experience. The school's creative approach to teaching anatomy has been a highlight. Surrey's integration of science and clinical learning from the outset, supported by research-led teaching, is setting it apart as a leader in shaping the future of medical education.

Beyond education, the School is helping tackle the NHS workforce shortage by increasing medical school places to meet the UK's growing and more complex health needs. Securing over 30 government-funded places in just its second year – the most in the region – the School is already contributing to the long-term workforce plan and aims to expand further at the next opportunity. The first students will graduate in 2028, and Professor Wright is optimistic that many will stay in the region, strengthening local healthcare. “A high proportion of graduates tend to remain where they train, and we want to grow our own school of excellence here in Surrey.”

Increasing participation of traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education is another cornerstone of Surrey's mission. Scholarships, both full and partial, ensure that students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation students, ethnic minority students, and students with disabilities can pursue medicine. Professor Wright stresses the importance of diversity in healthcare: “It's really important that doctors represent the population they serve. Financial support helps open opportunities for those who might otherwise be excluded.”

For Professor Wright, one of the most rewarding moments so far was watching students complete their first clinical exams: “They looked like excellent medical students, they looked like future doctors. The course works.”

As the school enters its second year, its priorities are clear: maintain high standards, expand opportunities, and nurture a community of compassionate, curious, and capable doctors. With Professor Wright's leadership and the enthusiasm of the students, the medical school is poised to have a lasting and transformative impact on Surrey, its healthcare system, and the wider region.



## Celebrating a decade of distinction: Surrey's School of Veterinary Medicine at 10

In 2014, the University of Surrey launched a bold experiment: a veterinary school designed not just to prepare graduates for “day one,” but for a lifetime in a dynamic, demanding profession. Ten years on, the School of Veterinary Medicine is thriving – recognised nationally for reshaping how vets are trained.

### Risk takers and trailblazers

The first students, arriving in 2014, took a leap of faith in a new and untested model, and, graduating in 2019, they stepped straight into one of the profession's greatest challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic. Surrey's students, staff, and partners rose to the occasion, proving their resilience and collaborative spirit.

### A model that changed the game

Surrey pioneered a new model of clinical education, replacing the traditional teaching hospital with placements in general practices – the settings where most vets will work. “We train vets for the real world,” says Head of School, Professor Kamalan Jeevaratnam. Initially unconventional, the approach is now influencing national standards and in 2023, the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons adopted a similar approach.

### From classroom to career

Surrey's ethos produces versatile, adaptable professionals. Graduates have worked across shelter medicine (improving the lives of homeless animals whether they live in rescue centres or out on the streets), wildlife care, and primary practice (the initial stage of veterinary education where students gain practical experience in various veterinary practices) – exactly the kind of professional agility the School set out to inspire. Employers notice the difference: Surrey graduates are known for being confident, intuitive, and ready to contribute from day one.



### Powered by philanthropy

Generous donors have played a vital role in the School's success. Their support has enabled the development of realistic training models, pioneering research initiatives, and open-access laboratories – where research output is freely available to all. For example, funding from The Alborada Trust has advanced key studies into the gut microbiome. The School's *One Health, One Medicine* philosophy focuses on creating and leading globally connected health research and education while sharing innovation and knowledge widely. This ethos drives sustainable improvements in the wellbeing of both humans and animals, supporting progress in fields ranging from equine welfare to Parkinson's disease, and cardiology research funded by the British Heart Foundation.

### Collaboration at the core

Partnerships with over 135 veterinary practices and organisations, including the Blue Cross, PDSA, RSPCA, and The Pirbright Institute, give students unmatched real-world exposure. International placements, supported by Turing Scheme funding, extend these opportunities globally. Philanthropy continues to strengthen these foundations, with legacy gifts supporting students for decades to come.

### Looking ahead

“The future isn't about getting bigger – it's about getting bolder,” says Professor Jeevaratnam. The School plans to expand its international profile, deliver bespoke training for global veterinarians, and lead research that transforms practice – always staying true to its founding values.

### Join the movement

As Surrey's Vet School celebrates its first decade, it invites alumni, partners, and supporters to shape the next chapter. This is more than a school – it's a movement redefining the veterinary profession for generations to come.

Learn more at [surrey.ac.uk/school-veterinary-medicine](https://surrey.ac.uk/school-veterinary-medicine)  
Follow us on LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/showcase/surrey-vet-school](https://www.linkedin.com/showcase/surrey-vet-school)

## Exercise and cancer

Surrey researchers are proving exercise is a powerful tool in cancer care – before, during and after treatment.

Dr David Bartlett's research trial showed fitness training improved immune responses in oesophageal cancer, with some patients achieving full remission. His trial for leukaemia patients boosts quality of life and may slow disease progression. Dr Ralph Manders is designing rehabilitation programmes for bowel cancer survivors, already improving physical and mental wellbeing. The team is extending work to prostate, pancreatic, kidney and immunotherapy-treated cancers. Their goal is to establish an Exercise and Energy Balance in Oncology Institute and make exercise a standard part of cancer treatment.



## Parkinson's

At Surrey, researchers are tackling Parkinson's on multiple fronts.

Professor Kamalan Jeevaratnam is using multi-omics and electrophysiological based approaches to detect early heart-brain communication issues linked to the disease. Professor Johnjoe McFadden is studying electromagnetic fields to ease symptoms and slow progression, while Dr Ayse Demirkan investigates the gut microbiome, identifying links between exercise and gut microbiome to uncover potential probiotics as a therapy. With 25,000 new UK Parkinson's cases yearly and 1 in 37 affected, Surrey's patient-centred research, supported by donations from alumni Cled & Valerie Cole, and the Geoff Payne Family & Friends Charity, aims to detect earlier, personalise treatment, and improve quality of life. Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurological condition, and Surrey is working to give people back control.

## Artificial Retinas

Dr Maxim Shkunov's team at Surrey's Advanced Technology Institute is developing the world's first full-colour artificial retina.

Unlike existing monochrome implants, this flexible, curved prosthesis mimics the eye's rods and cones using low-cost semiconducting polymers that absorb red, green and blue light. Its pixelated design promises natural colour vision, comfort, and minimally invasive surgery. Built on four years of doctoral research, prototypes are now being tested for reliable stimulation in an electrolyte environment. Next steps include testing with Surrey's School of Veterinary Medicine. This breakthrough highlights Surrey's global collaboration and mission to transform lives through technology.

The technology builds on four years of doctoral research and aims to match the light absorption and signal-transduction behaviour of human photoreceptors.



# Pioneering performance: 90 years of Guildford School of Acting

2025 marked the 90th anniversary of the Guildford School of Acting (GSA). Part of the University since 2009, this milestone celebrates decades of creativity, innovation and transformative training. What started in 1935 as the Grant-Bellairs School of Dance and Drama in London has grown into a powerhouse of performance education based in the heart of Surrey.

## From studio to stage: how GSA began

Renamed the Guildford School of Acting and Dance in 1964, it later dropped "Dance" in the 1990s and joined the University in 2009, moving into purpose-built facilities beside the Ivy Arts Centre on Stag Hill the following year. The move marked a new era of creative collaboration and cemented GSA's reputation as one of the UK's leading conservatoires for performance training.

## A legacy cast in excellence

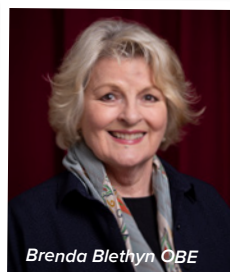
For over 90 years, GSA has shaped a global legacy through its alumni, whose names shine on and off the stage and screen. The School's graduates have gone on to careers that span the arts, entertainment, and creative industries worldwide:

**Brenda Blethyn OBE** – Oscar-nominated actress and Golden Globe winner, whose performances in *Secrets & Lies*, *Vera* and countless theatre productions exemplify the craft and emotional depth nurtured at GSA.

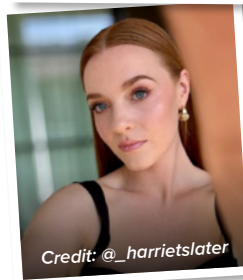
**Michael Ball OBE** – One of Britain's best-loved musical theatre stars and recording artists, Ball has captivated audiences in *Les Misérables*, *Phantom of the Opera* and *Hairspray*, while also building a celebrated broadcasting career.

**Bill Nighy** – Known for his distinctive wit and gravitas, Nighy has become an international screen icon through roles in *Love Actually*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Living*, the latter earning him his first Academy Award nomination.

**Celia Imrie CBE** – Beloved for her sharp wit and versatility, Imrie has starred in *Calendar Girls*, *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again*, alongside acclaimed stage and television work. Most recently, she brought her trademark humour to



Brenda Blethyn OBE



Credit: @\_harrietslater

The *Celebrity Traitors*, further showcasing the charisma and spirit that began at GSA.

**Kobna Holdbrook-Smith MBE** – An Olivier Award-winning actor, Holdbrook-Smith has earned critical acclaim for performances in *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, *Death of a Salesman* and across film and television.

**Justin Fletcher MBE** – Beloved by families across the UK, Fletcher has revolutionised children's television with *Tweenies* and his character "Mr Tumble" in *Something Special*, championing inclusivity through performance.

**Harriet Slater** – A rising star, currently delighting international audiences as Ellen MacKenzie in *Outlander: Blood of My Blood*.

**Gaby Roslin** – A household name in British television and radio, Roslin became a familiar face to millions as co-host of *The Big Breakfast* in the 1990s, and continues to lead in broadcasting today.

**Maddie Grace Jepson** – Part of the next generation of West End talent, recently making her debut as Lorraine in *Back to the Future: The Musical*.

## Contemporary centre of excellence

Today, GSA stands among the UK's elite conservatoires, ranked 1st for Drama & Music in the Daily Mail University Guide 2025 and 3rd for Dance, Drama and Cinematics in the Complete University Guide 2026. With 98.9% of graduates pursuing successful careers or further study (Graduate Outcomes 2025, HESA), the School's impact is clear.

## Championing inclusivity, sustainability & innovation

GSA focuses on widening access to the arts with initiatives like audio-described theatre, relaxed performances, offering audition fee waivers, and more. Specialist programmes such as the BA (Hons) Applied and Contemporary Theatre, online BA and MA courses, dance education diplomas, and fully funded foundation entries reflect our commitment to inclusion, sustainability, and career diversity.

## Shaping the next 90 years

As we celebrate this remarkable milestone, our vision is clear: to empower artists who shape culture and community.

## Where will GSA go from here?

**Global engagement:** From international touring to enhanced online Masters and Master of Fine Arts programmes, GSA will continue broadening its global reach.

**Technological innovation:** On-campus rehearsal rooms, production studios, and digital technologies will lead the way in immersive and interdisciplinary art forms.

**Inclusive pathways:** Expanding scholarships, foundation courses, outreach partnerships and mentoring schemes will continue to break down entry barriers. Around 70 GSA students, representing roughly 14% of the cohort, are currently supported through scholarship programmes, reflecting the School's commitment to increasing opportunities across the performing arts.

**Sustainable stagecraft:** Ecology-informed productions and responsible arts leadership will be embedded across training and practice.

## A standing ovation for 90 years

From its early days as a dance and drama pioneer, through world-class conservatoire rankings, to an ever-growing stage of artists, educators and theatre production professionals – the Guildford School of Acting has left an indelible impact on global performance.

As we raise a toast to GSA's 90 years, we recognise the past; we applaud today's successes; and we stride confidently into a future ready to shape the stories, songs, stages – and social change to come.



Professor Catherine McNamara, Head of GSA, shares her optimism:

"As I look to the future and think about what GSA will be like in its 100th year, I see students from all walks of life and inspirational teachers making a difference.

My own work as the Head of GSA is an ongoing process of listening, learning and making a lifelong commitment to improving access to, and the experience of, our training and education for all people."

## See the next generation take the stage

Celebrate 90 years of GSA by joining us in the audience. From contemporary plays to classic revivals and dazzling musicals, our students bring creativity and craft to every performance.

Follow the link or scan the QR code to explore our upcoming season and book your tickets. We'd love to welcome you to GSA.

[gsauk.org/events](https://gsauk.org/events)



## P.S. GSA on air – new podcast series

As part of the GSA's 90th year celebrations, staff been busy recording a brand-new podcast series. The first episodes – featuring conversations with current staff and hosted by Professor McNamara – are available now!



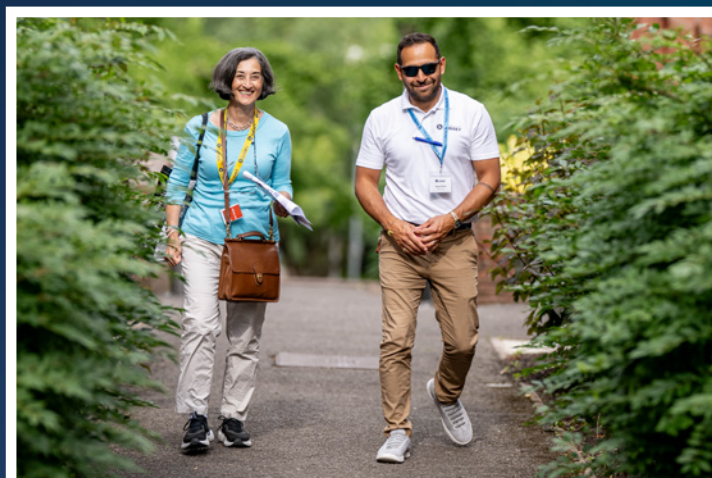




# Celebrating The Surrey Weekender 2025

In June, we welcomed 200 alumni back to campus for Surrey Weekender 2025 – a joyful celebration of community, connection, and nostalgia.

Alumni travelled from across the globe, with guests joining us from Australia, the USA, the UAE, Venezuela, Qatar, continental Europe, Ireland – and even just down the road in Guildford! Their graduation years spanned an incredible 58 years of Surrey's history, from our pioneering days in 1967 through to as recently as 2023. The weekend kicked off on Friday evening with dinner and drinks by the lake, accompanied by the smooth sounds of saxophonist Nik Pike. The night continued with a lively pub quiz at Hari's Bar hosted by Surrey alumnus Professor Alex Seal, which ended in a dramatic tiebreaker victory for the SurreyLeaders.



"Meant an awful lot to be back on campus for the first time since '98. Team Alumni bridge that gap so well, so much so that it feels like I only left yesterday."



"Amazing weekend, so well organised. Absolutely brilliant. So lovely to meet new people and old friends."



"It was amazing to go back over old haunts and very happy memories from 50 years ago. The central part of the uni is much like I remember, and it was excellent to have the campus tour to fill in the rest. Thank you for bringing those wonderful memories back alive!"



The celebration culminated with dancing and drinks at the Students' Union, where some alumni kept the dancefloor alive right through to the 2am close. It was a pleasure to welcome our alumni back to Surrey – to reconnect with old friends, forge new bonds, and share their stories.

"We all shared some wonderful memories and made some fabulous new ones."



Saturday offered a full programme, including campus tours, quick-fire research talks by Doctors Ana Andries, Daan Van der Veen, and David Bartlett, as well as Professor Sue Lanham-New, and a nostalgic session with alumnus Alan Sutherland, Director of Campus Operations. In the evening, a drinks reception in the amphitheatre was followed by a performance by the University of Surrey Big Band.





# Celebrating 2023 Vice-Chancellor's Alumni Award Winners

in 2024, against the storied backdrop of the House of Commons, Surrey honoured four outstanding alumni as the 2023 Vice-Chancellor's Alumni Awards winners – selected from nearly 200 nominations. Their achievements span engineering, entrepreneurial flair, innovation in clean energy, and unwavering volunteer leadership.

## Alumna of the Year

**Professor Anusha Shah, MSc Water and Environmental Engineering, 2000.**

A trailblazer since earning her degree, Anusha Shah led the Institution of Civil Engineers as its President – the third woman ever to do so. Under her guiding theme of “Making Connections for a Nature and People Positive World,” she continues to shape sustainable urban futures worldwide. A Senior Director at Arcadis, UK Climate Adaptation Lead, Non-Executive Director at the Met Office, Trustee of Green Alliance, and visiting Professor at the University of Edinburgh, Anusha's career exudes visionary leadership in climate resilience.



Professor Anusha Shah

## Alumni Achievement Award

**David Nolan**

Since graduating with a BSc in Business Economics in 2012, David Nolan has carved a path from Goldman Sachs trader to sustainable entrepreneur. Frustrated by the limited healthy options for his rescued staffie, he founded Butternut Box: a certified B Corp delivering fresh, nutritious meals to over 250,000 dogs across five countries. Of his charity, which donates meals and funding to help stray and vulnerable dogs worldwide, and supports human food banks in the UK, David says “It's not just about business – it's about creating a system that cares for dogs and their wellbeing.” His business not only revolutionised pet nutrition but also contributed hundreds of thousands of meals to dogs in need – truly embodying philanthropic innovation.



David Nolan



Dr Keyur Gandhi

## Young Achiever Award

**Dr Keyur Gandhi**

Dr Gandhi – a proud 2015 Surrey PhD graduate in Electrical Engineering – channels his expertise into Apollo Energy Analytics, blending AI and solar tech to optimise renewable energy assets. His international patent for an electrical “digital twin” and a strategic partnership with AVEVA signal Apollo's trajectory as a top ten global clean-energy startup.

## Volunteer of the Year

**Folarin Oyeleye**

A 2005 alumnus with a BEng in Electronic Engineering, Folarin Oyeleye has excelled in the financial world, currently serving as Head of EMEA Lending Solutions at J.P. Morgan Private Bank. As President of Surrey's Students' Union and later as a board member for 'The Future Says Surrey' campaign, he has been tireless in championing diversity, student support, and institutional growth. Additionally, his trusteeship of The King's Foundation cements his commitment to education, sustainability, and regeneration. He adds “Volunteering isn't an add-on – it's part of who you become as a Surrey graduate.”



Folarin Oyeleye



### The Vice-Chancellor's Alumni Awards

The winners of the 2025 awards will be announced in the spring.

We encourage you to visit [surrey.ac.uk/alumniawards](https://surrey.ac.uk/alumniawards) for the latest updates and full details once the results are released.

We look forward to honouring the next cohort of exceptional Surrey alumni with you.





## Staying at Surrey wasn't guaranteed Liam's Story

When Liam White arrived at Surrey in 2019 to study Psychology, he was drawn not just by the academic offering, but by the promise of something more personal.

"I chose Surrey because, unlike other universities I looked at, it spoke about its community and the support it gives its students," Liam says. "I saw everything Surrey did for students in hardship, for those facing mental health challenges, the support for clubs and societies – all of those things that go beyond the classroom. I knew then that Surrey was where I belonged."

From day one, Liam threw himself into campus life. He joined societies, made friends, and even took to the stage in *Strictly Come Surrey* with the Ballroom and Latin Dance Club. But halfway through his course, his Surrey experience nearly came to a premature end.

### When life took an unexpected turn

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic upended life as we knew it, Liam – who is estranged from his family – had no choice but to remain in university accommodation at Battersea Court. With part-time job opportunities drying up almost overnight, his financial situation quickly became unsustainable.

"I'd already taken out the maximum student loan and had dipped into my overdraft," he recalls. "Suddenly I was faced with a really stark question: can I afford to stay at university?"

That's when Liam turned to the Student Money Team, who encouraged him to apply for support from The Forever Surrey Fund – an emergency financial lifeline made possible by generous donations from Surrey alumni and friends.

"It meant everything. That support gave me the breathing space to stay, reintegrate into university life, and get back on track," Liam says. "It gave me the time to rebuild – academically, socially and emotionally."

"If I didn't have that olive branch of The Forever Surrey Fund, I probably would have dropped out."

He also reflects on the stigma students often feel when facing hardship.

"There's this idea that you have to be fiercely independent when you go to university. But even when you've prepared well, have a job lined up, and budget carefully, life still happens. It's okay to need help."

For Liam, that help changed everything. It gave him the chance to continue his degree and ultimately shaped the path he's on today, including being elected President of the Students' Union.

"If I hadn't had that olive branch, I probably would have dropped out. Instead, I finished my degree and found a voice as a student advocate. I found purpose."

### Thank you for standing behind Surrey students

Liam's story is just one example of the life-changing impact of The Forever Surrey Fund, and it's thanks to alumni and supporters like you.

The pressures students face today are very real. The rising cost of rent, food and transport means many are struggling to make ends meet, even while working part-time. In fact, the average maintenance loan now falls more than £500 short of covering essential monthly expenses.

- Rent in Guildford has **risen by £270 a month since 2022**, averaging £623 a month.
- **76% of students** say the cost of living is affecting their academic performance.
- Many are forced to sacrifice societies, social life, or even their studies to manage financially.

And yet, in the face of these challenges, your support has ensured that students in crisis don't have to navigate alone. Because of The Forever Surrey Fund and the people who give to it, students

like Liam have a safety net. One that helps them stay focused on learning, growing, and contributing.

Your support hasn't just provided financial help – it's preserved potential, protected ambition, and made sure no student has to abandon their degree because of hardship beyond their control.

### A story worth sharing

Liam's gratitude shines through in a recent interview reflecting on his time at Surrey. From student life to leadership, and the pivotal role of The Forever Surrey Fund, Liam shares how the support he received helped him stay, and succeed.

Thanks to the kindness and foresight of alumni and friends, The Forever Surrey Fund continues to be there for students when they need it most. Whether it's helping with a sudden expense, covering essentials, or simply ensuring a student can stay enrolled, your support makes the difference.

From Liam, and from all the students whose journeys have been shaped by your generosity – **thank you.**

Because of you, the Surrey experience continues to be one of community, compassion, and opportunity.



Watch Liam's full story on **YouTube** – scan the QR code to hear directly from him.  
Or search "*Liam's Surrey Story – The Forever Surrey Fund*" on YouTube



# Leadership is about people, always

Alan Parker CBE

When Alan Parker CBE graduated from the University of Surrey in 1969 with a degree in Hotel and Catering Administration, few could have predicted the scale of his future impact. Half a century later, Alan is recognised as one of the UK's most influential hospitality leaders – the architect behind Whitbread's transformation into a powerhouse of British leisure, with brands like Premier Inn and Costa Coffee under his leadership.

"I was drawn to Surrey because of a recommendation from my father," he recalls. "He and my mother ran a family restaurant, and when he found out about this new course at a soon-to-be university, it just made sense. It felt pioneering – like being part of something new."

Alan's early years at Battersea College of Technology laid the foundation for a career that would span continents. Some time after completing his degree, he studied for an advanced management programme at Harvard Business School. "You arrive wondering whether you'll keep up with the best in global business. By the end, I knew I could more than hold my own. Hospitality is a brilliant, demanding business – and I was proud to represent it."

**"The experience of university isn't just academic – it's transformational. I arrived a boy and left a young man."**

Alan's career took him from managing hotels across Europe with Bass Plc, to overseeing operations from South Africa to Reykjavik for Holiday Inn. But it was at Whitbread where he left a lasting legacy. "When I joined, we had 12 Travel Inns. When I left, we had hundreds of Premier Inns and thousands of Costa outlets. We sold off non-core brands and focused our investment in businesses that would lead the market."

Becoming CEO, Alan introduced a unified, company-wide scorecard, with just four measures – finance, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and performance against plan. "It was a revolution in how the business was run. Everyone knew what success looked like – from head office to hotel front desks."



In July 2025, Alan returned to Surrey to receive an honorary degree. "It was completely unexpected and deeply meaningful" he says. The recognition held personal significance, because Alan's son Charlie is also a Surrey graduate and now serves as Regional Vice President and General Manager at Four Seasons Resort Hualalai in Kailua, Hawaii.

**"I don't have any regrets. That's something I'd wish for anyone."**

Alan's commitment to public service has been just as strong. From advising global tourism bodies to serving as a borough councillor in Elmbridge, Surrey, he remains passionate about giving back. "We underestimate the value of hospitality to the economy – and to people's wellbeing. I've always fought for its recognition."

When asked what advice he'd give to graduates today, he doesn't hesitate: "Life is not a rehearsal. If you want to make a difference, act – and act with integrity."

Now Chair of Trustees for a Royal Family charitable trust, Alan remains grounded. "I'm most proud of my family – my daughter Nicola, son Charlie, and five wonderful grandchildren – and building a second life with Susan after I retired from the executive world. And no, I don't have any regrets. That's something I'd wish for anyone."

# Be curious, be kind

How Surrey shaped Judith Batchelar OBE

When Judith Batchelar OBE arrived at the University of Surrey to study Medical Biochemistry in 1977, she didn't know quite where her path would lead, but she knew she loved science. Originally intending to study medicine, Judith had a last-minute change of heart.

"Not getting a place at medical school turned out to be the best thing that ever happened," she reflects. "I realised I didn't want to be a doctor – I wanted to explore the science behind it all."

**"I cried when I graduated. I could have stayed forever."**

Drawn by Surrey's outstanding reputation and the opportunity to study Medical Biochemistry with a forensic science component, Judith quickly immersed herself in both academic and campus life. "It was such a welcoming community," she recalls. "The transition from school to university felt seamless. I cried when I graduated. I could have stayed forever."

An avid sportswoman, Judith represented Surrey in badminton and fondly remembers the camaraderie of student life. "The rugby club's drag disco was the highlight of the year!" she laughs. "That mix of fun, sport and science shaped me in so many ways."

After discovering that lab work wasn't her calling during an industry placement year, Judith taught science and dabbled in design before moving into food manufacturing and, ultimately, product development at Marks & Spencer. "I've worked in chocolate, wine, brewing – all the bad things," she jokes. "But beneath it all was a scientific foundation that I built at Surrey."

Judith's career went on to span science, policy, sustainability and food innovation. At Sainsbury's, she spearheaded the development of the now-familiar traffic light nutrition labelling system – a voluntary initiative that transformed how customers understand food. "It changed perceptions and behaviours," she says. "That's what matters: giving people the information to make informed choices."



**"Not getting into medical school was the best thing that ever happened to me."**

**"Sustainability isn't a single issue, it's complex and place-based."**

For Judith, transparency in food systems is a lifelong mission. "Whether it's championing clear labelling or supporting sustainable supply chains, I've always believed in treating consumers with respect," she explains. "That, and working with people who are smarter than me – something I learned from my brilliant lecturers at Surrey."

Now Chair of the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, a trustee of Kew Gardens, and Honorary President of the British Nutrition Foundation, Judith continues to bridge science and leadership, applying decades of experience to some of today's most urgent challenges. "Sustainability isn't a single issue, it's complex and place-based," she says. "Surrey's strengths in geospatial analytics and environmental science are more relevant than ever."

**"You don't have to know where you're going, just explore."**

Awarded an OBE for services to farming and the food industry in 2015, Judith remains as curious and committed as ever. "I never had a master plan," she says. "I just said yes to interesting opportunities. You don't have to know where you're going, just explore. Be kind, be curious, work hard, and encourage others to do the same. That advice took me from Surrey to the Andes, to a fishing boat off Iceland, to policy meetings in Westminster."

Her message to current students? "You're a long time working, so do something you love."



# “I realised I had the most incredible experience that none of these other people had.”

**Alex Collins (BSc Business Management, 2007), Chief Operating Officer, Infinite pl.**

From managing a school vending machine to leading tech ventures in the Middle East, Alex's journey from Surrey's Business Management Course to international entrepreneur is anything but ordinary.



When Alex first visited Surrey as a teenager, he was drawn to the campus lifestyle – and the brand-new Surrey Business School. “It was exciting to be the first cohort,” he recalls. “Of course, you think the building makes the difference, but it's the academics who really shape your experience.”

He thrived in the fast-growing programme and quickly became a student representative. His early advocacy led to leadership roles in the Students' Union, first as Academic Affairs Officer and later as President.

**“At such a young age, being on the University Council really opened my eyes to what it takes to run an organisation.”**

As President, Alex sat on disciplinary panels, tackled budgets, and worked with senior leaders, gaining invaluable mentorship from figures like the Vice-Chancellor and Director of Finance. “It was like a crash course in leadership. At such a young age, being on the University Council really opened my eyes to what it takes to run an organisation,” he says. Surrey also shaped his personal life: he met his wife Leanne – also a Surrey grad – at a student union beach party, and today they're parents to twins.

## From Guildford to the Gulf

After graduating, Alex joined EY's graduate scheme in consulting. “Surrey wasn't even on their recruitment list back then,” he says, “but most grads hadn't run an organisation. I had 150 staff and millions in turnover as SU President.” Specialising in government consulting, he discovered that successful projects depend more on people than technology.

A call from a mentor in 2012 led to a six-week project in Saudi Arabia, which led to 12 years in the Middle East. **“It was the ultimate out-of-my comfort zone challenge. But I loved it – and it shaped everything that followed.”**

At EY Middle East, Alex created a graduate

programme that brought in over 500 young professionals, many now senior leaders. Later, as Managing Director of a UAE government innovation fund, he discovered his passion for working with startups. This led to co-founding RAI Digital, a venture-building firm for government and large enterprises.

In 2022, RAI Digital launched a joint venture with Saudi Post – Infinite Platforms and Logistics (Infinite PL) – where Alex now serves as Chief Operating Officer. The company has grown from zero to 300 employees across four countries. “We're not just consulting anymore, we're creating new businesses, grounded in technology and powered by people.”

## Staying grounded

Raising twins overseas with no nearby family taught Alex the value of community and balance. He sets boundaries, plans ahead, and treats work-life balance like a KPI. “It's something you have to track, talk about, and adapt.”

## Giving back – and looking ahead

As a founding SurreyLeader, Alex has helped expand the alumni network in the Middle East, hosting the first Surrey alumni event in Saudi Arabia. He's also the founding donor of the Surrey Leaders Fund, which supports young entrepreneurs at Surrey.

**“You can always make more difference together than you can alone.”**

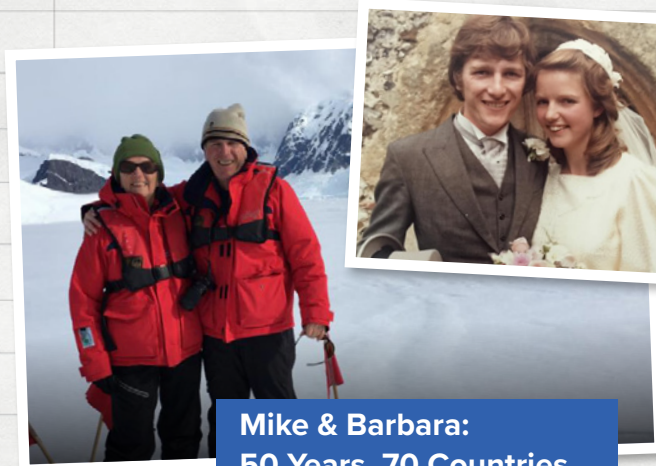
Why stay connected after all these years? “It's not just nostalgia. Surrey is a university with vision. I'm proud to be part of that. I hope in 20 years we're still meeting, contributing, and making Surrey stronger.”



Alex and family

## Class notes

Who's doing what and where?



Mike & Barbara:  
50 Years, 70 Countries

**Mike Dexter-Smith and Barbara Haigh (BSc Hotel and Catering Management, 1975)**

Married just after graduating in 1975, Mike and Barbara have built a life of travel, careers, and curiosity. From Yorkshire to New Zealand, Cleveland to Kauai, their adventures span continents. Barbara now teaches online courses for a community college, while Mike supports community initiatives in North Carolina. They've travelled to more than 70 countries, encountering polar bears, penguins, and even building a school in Nepal. Their journey began at Surrey and continues to inspire – with a milestone 50th wedding anniversary to celebrate it all.



Eugenia's Kitchen  
Goes Global

**Eugenia Leao (MSc Tourism Marketing, 2000)**

After studying tourism marketing at Surrey, Eugenia returned to Macao determined to champion her city's culinary culture. She created *Eugenia's Kitchen*, running hands-on workshops in Macanese cooking that attract food lovers from Asia, the U.S., and beyond. Through social media, she shares recipes and cultural stories, promoting Macanese cuisine worldwide. Her workshops on iconic dishes – like the beloved Portuguese egg tart – combine hospitality and heritage. Surrey gave Eugenia the foundation; now she's feeding a global appetite for tradition with a modern twist.

## Odelia's Producer Pivot

**Odelia Zucker (MSc Management, 1996)**

After years excelling in sales and business development, Odelia followed her dream into entertainment. She's now an Executive Producer creating factual TV series and developing films with international teams. Her Surrey degree gave her the business savvy to manage big projects, while her creative passion drives her storytelling. Odelia's career pivot shows that it's never too late to pursue a dream – and that a Surrey education can take you from boardrooms to broadcast studios and everywhere in between.



## Genoveva's Spotlight Success

**Genoveva Umeh (LLB Law, 2018)**

Genoveva swapped law for the limelight – and it paid off. She's starred in Netflix hits like *Blood Sisters* and *Far From Home* and recently won Best Supporting Actress at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards for

*Breath of Life* on Prime Video. Genoveva's performances explore African stories with global resonance. Off screen, she mentors young creatives and supports youth initiatives. Her legal training at Surrey gave her the resilience to navigate the acting world – and to make her mark doing what she loves.

## Joanna Hart (BMus, 2002)

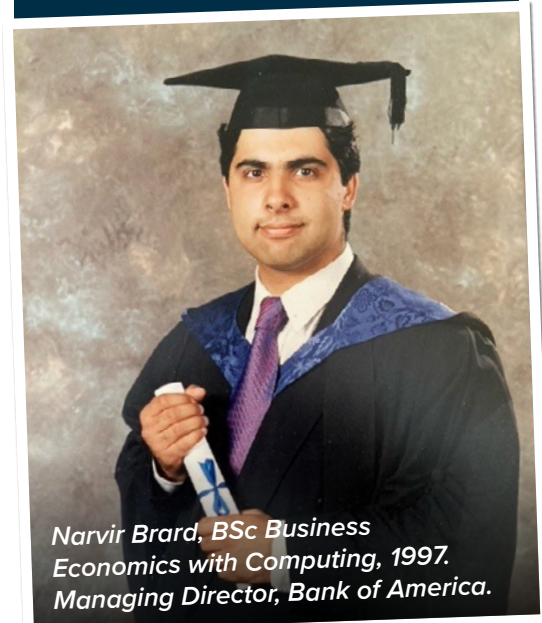
After a fulfilling teaching career, which culminated in her role as Head of Music at The Royal School in Haslemere, Joanna transitioned into heritage arts. She now manages Short Courses and the Tutor Programme at the Royal School of Needlework, based in Hampton Court Palace. In 2023, she was honoured to contribute to a moment of national significance – working on the Anointing Screen used during the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III. Joanna's journey from music education to historic craftsmanship reflects the rich and varied paths that a Surrey degree can inspire.



## Get in touch

If you'd like to feature in our next issue of Forever Surrey, please let us know what you've been up to since graduation: [surrey.ac.uk/shareyourstory](https://surrey.ac.uk/shareyourstory)





Narvir Brard, BSc Business Economics with Computing, 1997. Managing Director, Bank of America.

## Why I give

**“Looking back on my time at Surrey, I feel incredibly fortunate. When I came to university in the 1990s, higher education was tuition fee-free. If you had the grades, you were in. That access changed my life. It gave me a level playing field, especially coming from a state school. Now, access to university is not just about academic merit, but also financial means. That’s why I give.”**

Narvir’s professional journey took him to major investment banks – BNP Paribas, J.P. Morgan, Nomura, and Citi. But it was Surrey that first opened his eyes to the world of finance and economics. “The breadth of teaching, from macro to micro, gave me the space to discover what really interested me. I didn’t come to university with a clear path, but I left with a direction, thanks in part to a placement at the Treasury that helped steer me into the City.

“Surrey shaped my worldview. Beyond the academics, I was involved in the Economics Society, eventually serving as treasurer. It was a small role, but a formative one – it gave me a sense of responsibility, a chance to meet people from other year groups, and ultimately helped me feel more connected to the university community.”

Since 2020, Narvir has co-funded undergraduate scholarships in Economics. “I remember the first update I received from a recipient: they spoke about being able to focus more on studies, to participate in university life, to join societies. That was powerful. Education should be more than lectures and assignments – it should be about the full experience. If a bursary helps lift even a small part of that financial pressure, then it’s worth every penny.

“Giving, to me, is a kind of reset. In the busyness of professional life, it’s easy to focus solely on career and family. Philanthropy reminds me there’s a wider world out there. Supporting students who are just starting out – just as I once did – brings a quiet satisfaction.

The opportunity to co-fund the scholarship with leading Economist Lord Jim O’Neill, Baron O’Neill of Gatley came through a conversation with the University’s Advancement Team. “I hadn’t realised how many ways alumni can stay connected and give back until someone explained it. It’s not always about writing a cheque – sometimes it’s about aligning your values with a meaningful initiative.”

Narvir’s son, now studying for his A-Levels, recently joined his father on a visit to Surrey’s campus “So much has changed – new schools, world-class facilities – but the heart of the place remains the same. It’s still where young people can discover who they are and what they want to become.”

One of four O’Neill-Brard Undergraduate Scholars, Tiv recently graduated with a First-Class Honours degree in Economics and Mathematics.

She says the scholarship gave her freedom to focus on her dissertation – on the impact of regional funding on NHS waiting times – while also boosting her skills in econometric analysis.

Away from study, she joined ArtSoc to relieve stress and reconnect with creativity during a busy year. Looking ahead, Tiv admits it’s daunting not to have a clear plan but is optimistic about the future.



Narvir and Lord O'Neill

“

**Thank you for your support through the scholarship. I would not have been able to afford my accommodation on campus this year without this funding, which would have made my final year at university difficult. ”**

Thiviya “Tiv” Thiyagarajah, O’Neill-Brard Undergraduate Scholar and 2025 graduate

## From BA to BSc: Gabriella’s journey to Mental Health Nursing



Gabriella

**When Gabriella Sweeney, a Ted Adams Trust Scholar, made the decision to leave her 12-year career as British Airways cabin crew, she never imagined where the path would take her.**

“I loved my job,” she reflects, “but something changed. I didn’t want to travel as much, and I wanted to give back in a different way.”

That change of direction brought her to working in supported living just before the pandemic – a time of intense challenge and transformation. Working with neurodivergent young adults, some non-verbal and managing complex mental health needs, Gabriella was thrown into a high-pressure environment. “It was the most difficult thing I’ve ever done,” she says, “but it taught me that I thrive in crisis. I want to help people through their hardest moments.”

The experience sparked a new ambition: to retrain as a mental health nurse. Encouraged by friends, family, and her own lived experience – including the tragic loss of her baby daughter Isabella Eden in 2014 – Gabriella embarked on an access course and applied to Surrey. “When I visited on the open day, I knew. The facilities were outstanding. The students in uniform looked so professional. I could see myself there.”

Now in the first year of her degree, Gabriella speaks with warmth and conviction about the road she’s taken. “This isn’t the future I thought I’d have,” she says. “But it’s the right one. My life now is about turning pain into purpose.”

The support of a Ted Adams Trust Nursing Scholarship, which provides eligible students with £4,000 a year for a maximum of three years, has been pivotal. Like many mature students, Gabriella faced the financial reality of leaving full-time work. The scholarship helped ease the pressure – especially the cost of maintaining her car, which she relies on for long commutes to placement. “It’s more than financial support,” she says. “It’s a piece of the puzzle that’s helping me build this new life.”

Beyond her studies, Gabriella volunteers for a student support service and hosts The Baby Loss Podcast, creating space for others affected by loss. “I wanted to give people a voice,” she explains. “We need to break the stigma around grief. No one should feel alone.”

Gabriella’s dream is to specialise in bereavement care within the NHS. It’s a dream rooted in personal experience and sustained by education, empathy, and resilience. “There are so many people who supported me through the darkest time. Now I want to be that person for someone else.”

Meeting the Ted Adams Trustees at a recent scholar’s lunch was a meaningful moment. “One of them remembered my application,” Gabriella recalls. “That really touched me. It meant they saw something in me.”



...hanging up one uniform for another



More about the Ted Adams Trust



## “Still Surrey till we die” The power of GradSport and the legacy of UniS Old Boys FC

**GradSport 2025 brought the University of Surrey’s alumni community back to campus for another incredible day of sport, sunshine, and connection. With 375 alumni returning to compete across 30 different sports, Team Alumni added another win to the record books, pushing the current leaderboard to 7–4 in their favour.**

But beyond the scoreboard, GradSport is about something more enduring: friendships, memories, and the alumni who help keep those traditions alive. Few people capture that spirit more than Paul Cliff (BSc Biochemistry with Toxicology, 1996; MSc Toxicology, 1997; Executive MBA, 2019), long-time GradSport volunteer and Life President of the legendary UniS Old Boys FC.

“There’s always a moment where I look around after the match and think, ‘Look at this. There’s 30 of us here, and hundreds of other people we went to uni with, celebrating with current students,’” says Paul. “It’s just that sense of where I belong. It’s my tribe.”

### Football first – and forever

UniS Old Boys FC traces its roots back to 1989, and to Paul’s own Surrey story in the ‘90s. “When I interviewed for my place at Surrey, Professor Gordon Gibson was very tongue-in-cheek and said I could only come to the University if I played football for the staff and student team on Sundays,” Paul recalls. “So as well as playing for the University on Saturdays, I played for the University Strollers on Sundays. It became a big part of my life here.”

After graduating, Paul didn’t stray far from Guildford, later helping build a formal alumni football team. “In ‘99, we formed UniS Old Boys. It was all the same people who had been playing in the GIs – the Graduates and Industrial year teams – and who had worked so hard to get promoted to the intermediate league in ‘97,” he explains. “At one point we had three



sides, 40-odd graduates turning up at the Varsity to play every Saturday. It was huge.”

Even though the formal club stepped back from league football in 2016, the annual alumni vs students match – the original spirit of GradSport – remains strong. “We’ve been playing every year since 1989, with the exception of COVID,” Paul says. “We did this for 20 years before GradSport was even conceived.”

### Volunteering to stay connected

Paul’s ongoing involvement with Surrey hasn’t been limited to football. As a coach and mentor, Paul runs his own Executive Coaching and HR Consultancy, North Face Consulting, and volunteers his time to support students and fellow alumni alike. “I just get a tremendous sense of satisfaction from it,” he says. “Fundamentally I want to give them the opportunities that Surrey created for me, and to make sure they can maximise those.”

Each year, Paul rallies the UniS Old Boys squad for GradSport, managing fixtures, gathering players, and ensuring everything runs smoothly. “There’s some self-interest, I suppose,” he laughs. “I’ve become the one that organises stuff, to make sure it happens so we don’t lose that connection.”

It’s a role he takes seriously – not just for the football, but for the friendships. “My best man was

my vice-chair when I was chair of the football club and is also godfather to my eldest son. Another of the Old Boys is my youngest son’s godfather and one of my biggest clients,” Paul says. “These are friends for life. That’s what makes the Old Boys so special.”

### Giving back year-round

GradSport also makes a difference beyond the pitch. Through The Forever Surrey Fund, £2 from every alumni ticket goes directly towards supporting student sports clubs and societies – helping them grow, thrive, and improve. Thanks to this support, a scoreboard is now being installed for the Rugby Club, and Surrey’s Taekwondo team recently received Olympic-grade scoring equipment.

“Everyone has a fantastic time at University,” Paul says. “But it’s that tipping point – continuing those friendships into the first couple of years after graduation – that makes a real difference. Most people lose touch after a year or two. But we’ve kept that cadence of connection alive.”

From spontaneous local reunions to an annual golf trip for the last 20 years, the network around UniS Old Boys continues to grow. “We’ve got a WhatsApp group for catching up for beers and golf. And then suddenly in February, someone says, ‘When’s GradSport this year?’” Paul laughs. “Then all the chat starts – ‘I’ll have to start running now,’ ‘I’ll dust off my boots.’ It gets us all back in that cycle.”

### More than just a match

Paul’s favourite GradSport memory? “When we beat Team Surrey – because it’s such a surprise to them usually,” he smiles. “But there was one year, I think it was the first time they introduced the GradSport trophy, and it coincided with FA Cup Final Day. Everyone stayed, the bar was

packed to the rafters. I got loads of abuse for lifting the trophy by my lot – which is just standard banter, but it was just a lovely day. The weather was fantastic. If I could bottle that memory to convince people to come back, that’s what I’d use.”

And the connections go well beyond campus. “My brother-in-law lives in Australia now, and I was arranging to meet up with two guys in Sydney who used to play for us – and they said, ‘Have you got in touch with Goddo?’ (Old Boys’ Paul Godson). Turns out he was playing for a team called Coogee United, just around the corner from Bondi, which had half a dozen players from UniS Old Boys FC over the years. The other side of the world, and they had come together again.”

### “Why wouldn’t you?”

For Paul, it’s clear why more alumni should get involved – whether through GradSport, volunteering, or mentoring. “Why wouldn’t you?” he says. “There are so many potential benefits. Introductions and referrals are the key to any business, and if people are looking for new opportunities, why not go to the place where you’ve already got relationships?”

“It’s brilliant. It reminds you of all the things you enjoyed about being at uni, the memories and relationships that have been built from it,” he says. “I’m 51 next month. Uni was just four years – but it’s been a touchstone for the rest of my life.”



## Support the Next Generation

### Support. Empower. Inspire.

The Forever Surrey Fund helps today’s students go further – on and off the field.

Your GradSport ticket helps – £2 from every alumni registration supports student-led projects that enhance clubs, societies, and the student experience.

#### Recent impact includes:

- A brand-new scoreboard for Surrey Rugby Club
- Olympic-grade scoring equipment for the Taekwondo team



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Whether it’s a one-off donation or setting up a regular gift, every pound makes a difference.

Learn more and donate at:  
[surrey.ac.uk/foreversurreyfund](https://surrey.ac.uk/foreversurreyfund)

### GradSport Returns – Save the Date!

### Saturday, 9 May

Get ready to reunite, compete and celebrate as Team Alumni takes on Team Surrey once again. Whether you’re playing, cheering or catching up with old teammates, GradSport is your chance to relive the best of Surrey sport – and make new memories too.

**Mark your calendar. Rally your team. We’ll see you back on campus.**



## In memoriam

### Professor Brian Allison (1947–2025)

#### Entrepreneur, mentor, and friend to Surrey Business School.

We are deeply saddened by the passing of Brian Allison in June 2025. A man of remarkable generosity, energy, and warmth, Brian touched countless lives through business, sport, travel, and education. His legacy will long endure at the University of Surrey and beyond.

Brian was a passionate supporter of Surrey Business School (SBS), where he served actively on the Advisory Board. He was known for his strategic insight, belief in people, and tireless advocacy for innovation and enterprise. His guidance helped shape a forward-thinking, entrepreneurial culture at SBS well before such values became widespread in higher education.

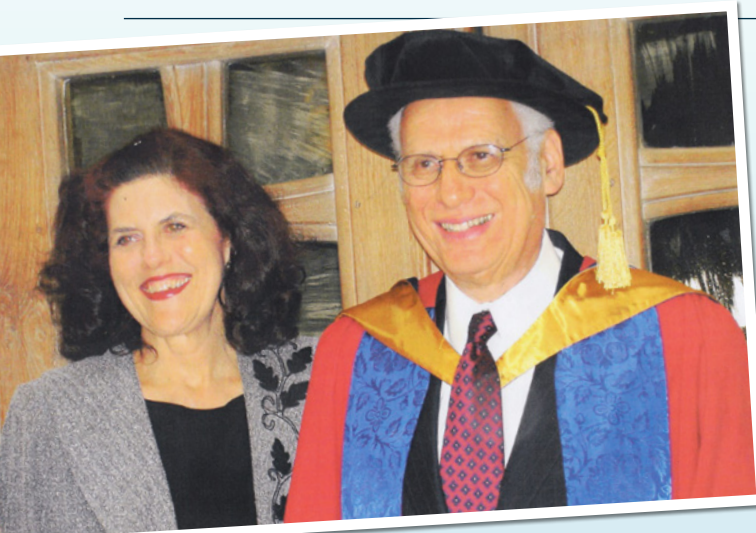
Dean Professor Iis Tussyadiah shared: "Brian's generosity and commitment to our mission have left a lasting mark on our community. We are grateful for his impact and will honour his legacy in our ongoing work."



Beyond his formal roles, Brian mentored countless students and staff, offering encouragement, practical wisdom, and inspiration. Dr Katya Murzacheva, Head of Enterprise, noted his pivotal role in fostering entrepreneurship at the School.

In recognition of his contributions, Brian was inducted into the SBS Hall of Fame, and received an Honorary Doctorate from Surrey in 2018, a testament to his enduring influence.

Brian lived with enthusiasm, integrity, and a rare openness, inspiring others to strive for success with purpose. Though we mourn his loss, we celebrate a life that shaped futures and sparked change. He will be greatly missed and warmly remembered.



### Dr Ernest Littauer (1936–2024)

#### We remember Dr Ernest Littauer with deep gratitude for his life, generosity, and unwavering support of the University of Surrey.

Born in Mill Hill, North London in 1936, Ernest's academic path began at Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School and continued at Battersea College of Technology, where he earned a BSc in Metallurgy and PhD in Electro-Metallurgy.

Ernest's remarkable career took him to the United States, where he rose to Vice President and General Manager of Missiles and Space Research at Lockheed Martin – an impressive achievement reflecting both intellect and ambition.

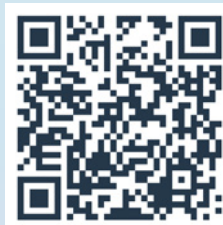
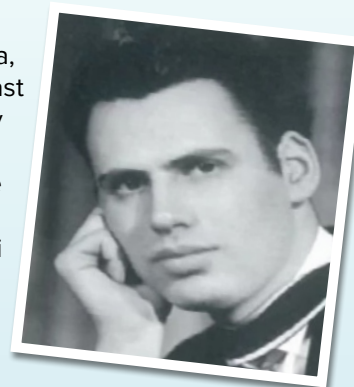
Alongside his wife Deveda, Ernest remained a steadfast advocate for future Surrey students. He was one of the first Directors of the Friends of Surrey charity in the US, enabling alumni in America to support the University. Ernest and Deveda's generosity supported bright, talented students in Engineering reach their potential through prizes and scholarships.

"It's exciting to know your contribution is helping people," Ernest said. "Surrey does a very good job of making it feel special."

In recognition of his achievements in industry, Ernest was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in 2005.

Ernest and Deveda's legacy is one of loyalty, vision, and kindness. Though Ernest's journey began in Battersea, his legacy will support Surrey students for generations to come.

To honour Ernest and Deveda Littauer's memory, contributions can be made to the Littauer Fund via the QR code or by visiting: [surrey.ac.uk/littauer-fund](https://surrey.ac.uk/littauer-fund)



## Down Time with Professor Sir Martin Sweeting



### TV, time travel and Tibetan adventures

Surrey alumnus Professor Sir Martin Sweeting – space pioneer, and founder of Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd – has spent his career looking to the stars. But how does he unwind here on Earth?



#### What are your go-to TV shows?

I don't watch much TV, but *Friends* has always been a favourite – it's perfect for switching off. I also enjoyed *The Big Bang Theory* (maybe a bit close to home!) and recently got hooked on *Friday Night Dinner*. Excruciating, but compulsively funny.

#### Is there a book you've always meant to read?

*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. I loved the BBC audio version so much that I've hesitated to read the book. If I were stranded on a desert island, I'd take the audio version without question.

#### Do you have a favourite book?

Arthur C. Clarke's short stories. I read them as a teenager, and they really made me think about the future and space. Leading a Royal Society study on 'Preparing for Space in 2075' reminded me of Clarke's vision – it felt like coming full circle.

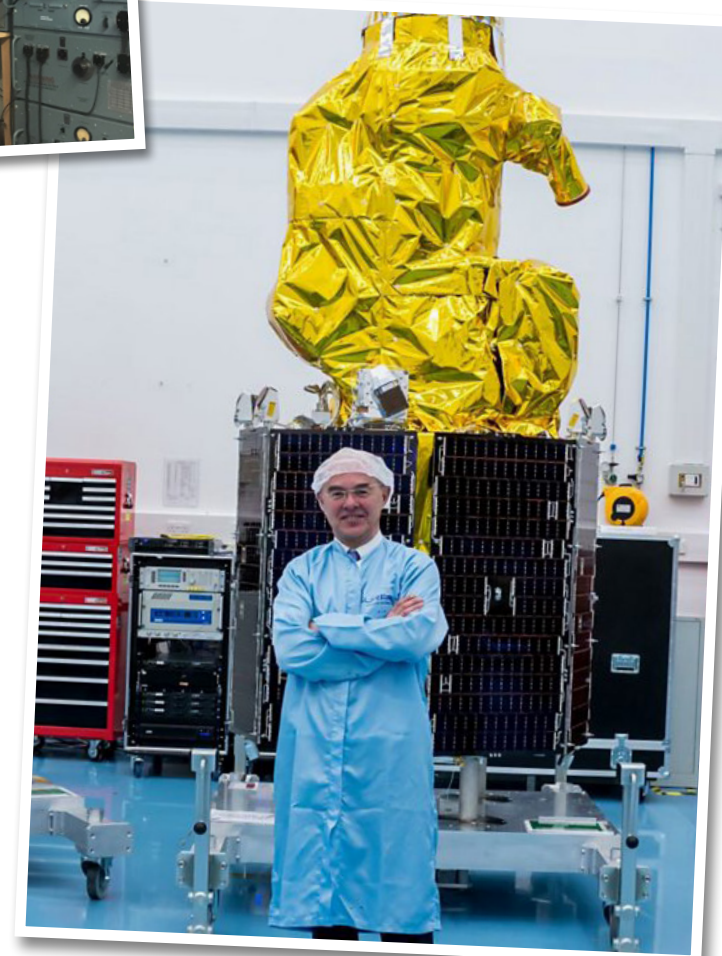
#### What's your taste in music?

Pretty eclectic: Queen, Handel's *Messiah*, and Tibetan chant. So that spans rock, classical, and something meditative.

#### What do you do for fun outside work?

I'm a radio amateur – I love building equipment and experimenting with shortwave. It feels like relaxed research. I also enjoy cycling, especially in adventurous places. My most memorable trip was in Ladakh, in the Himalayas, where I cycled up to 6,000 metres. That was extraordinary. I've long been fascinated by Tibet and have visited Lhasa several times.

## The last word



#### If we gave you a time machine, where would you go?

I'd travel to the end of this century to see where humanity stands. Have we discovered life beyond Earth? Have we come together to solve global problems? I hope technology like AI has been used responsibly, and that we've tackled environmental and social challenges. Ideally, we'll be more united, thoughtful, and cooperative – a world where discovery inspires us to care more for each other and our planet.





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