

PROFILE: THE UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING



Campus vista: the view over Airthrey Loch towards the Wallace Monument
JOHN MCPAKE

'You fall in love with Stirling – it's like a second home'

Mark Charters studied biology at Stirling for four years, and is now vice-president of welfare and education at the students' union.

"When I first came here, I remember seeing people canoeing on the loch in the middle of the campus, which was pretty amazing. I'm a biologist, so it was good to have the biology pretty close to the classroom. You're not that far from a field trip. You fall in love with Stirling – a lot of students feel that way. It's like a second home. It's a small campus, but it's nice to feel close to everyone. You look out of the window and can see the loch. You are a minute away from it. Then you have Hermitage Woods, which is part of the campus. The staff accommodation there looks a bit like a holiday village. It's about a two-hour walk to get up to Dumyat (the nearby range of hills). Then there is the Wallace Monument. It is a big mixture of the cultural and environmental."

Picture-perfect education

Fancy having a golf course in your back garden? Then head to Stirling, says **Harriet Swain**

Few universities can boast their own loch – even in Scotland. Nor their own golf course, woodland or view of a historic monument. But Stirling is not like most universities. Set in more than 300 acres of grounds at the foot of the Ochil Hills on the former Airthrey Estate, overlooking Airthrey loch and the towering Wallace Monument and beside Hermitage Woods, it is regularly described as one of the world's most beautiful campuses.

On receiving an honorary degree from his alma mater earlier this summer, John Reid, the former home secretary, not known for his sentimentality, said: "Walk around the place. Why would you want to go to any other university in the world?"

Today's students are just as enthusiastic. Jonny Greig, who has just finished his second year studying psychology at Stirling while training as a swimmer, says: "I couldn't ever have imagined coming to somewhere like this for university. It's stunning to look at."

He didn't just fall for the university's looks. As a keen 200m and 400m freestyle swimmer, who has competed for the British team at Crystal Palace already this year and aims eventually to compete in the Olympics, he was confident about getting the coaching and support he needed to continue with his sport (see box).

While Greig had considered going to the United States, where he spent time as a teenager, he changed his mind when

he saw that he could have similar facilities on his doorstep. Jason Atkins, who graduated in accountancy and sports studies at the university in 1996 and who returned last year to co-ordinate its Winning Students scholarship programme, says the university is keen to entice more sports-loving students, who would otherwise be tempted by America or England, to stay closer to home.

It seems to be working. In July, the former Wales youth international striker Craig Mason arrived to take up a football scholarship and start a degree in sports science, having turned down a chance to study in America.

Stirling has long prided itself on its sport. In 1981, it was the first Scottish

university to offer sports scholarships. It houses the National Swimming Academy and National Tennis Centre as well as, among other bodies, the Scottish Institute of Sport, Triathlon Scotland and Falkirk Football Club's training base.

It backs this up with a strong sports studies degree, which can now be combined with any one of 20 subjects from accountancy to social policy. The department was ranked first in Scotland and fifth in the UK in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. One of the attractions for athletes, apart from the facilities, is the modular programme, which offers plenty of flexibility.

This way of delivering degrees, and the two-semester year, which Stirling was the first university in the UK to

offer, are also attractive to local, non-traditional students. This helps to fulfil Stirling's original mission to provide higher education for people from all backgrounds. But it by no means appeals just to local students. Around 19 per cent of its 11,500 students are from overseas, and 80 different nationalities are represented on campus.

But Stirling is not just about sport. Stirling Management School was launched in 2008 with an emphasis on informing policy and management practice through research and on interdisciplinary work. The school is a co-partner with the university's department of nursing and midwifery in the Institute of People-Centred Healthcare Management.

The arts and social sciences are particular strengths, and Stirling has a well-regarded film, media and journalism department, but the university is also a world-class centre for marine sciences. Meanwhile, Stirling University Innovation Park is home to over 40 companies working in technology-based businesses.

The university library is in the process of a £13.9m transformation, due to be completed in autumn 2010, which will allow local entrepreneurs and business people to access the expertise of academic staff. But sport is rarely that far away. One of the most recent initiatives at the innovation park is a forum for people from different organisations and backgrounds to collaborate to produce innovative sports products and services.

And Alison Bell, a national hockey player, who has just started a PhD in coach education after studying for a Masters in sports studies at Stirling, appreciates the friendly atmosphere of the close-knit campus for sporting reasons too. She describes it as "a good atmosphere in terms of training".

Stirling effort: Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence

This summer marks the end of Stirling's first year as Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence. It also sees the launch of one of its first major initiatives in this role – a National Academy for Women's Football, with recruits due to arrive today.

The aim of the academy is to provide the coaching, facilities, financial support and networks to encourage talented women footballers to stay in Scotland rather than leave for top English teams, such as Arsenal or Fulham. It is hoped that the knock-on effect will be

to create a Scottish team able to take on the best in Europe. Two Scottish youth internationals, Christie Murray and Lisa Evans, are among the first recruits at the academy, taking up scholarships to study at Stirling this autumn.

As Scotland's University for Sporting Excellence, Stirling has been put at the heart of Scotland's sporting future in the run-up to the London 2012 Olympics and the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014.

Armed with £1.1m over two years from the Scottish

Funding Council, Stirling is responsible for developing more flexible programmes designed to support student athletes, and for co-ordinating a network of universities and colleges with sporting interests throughout Scotland.

Through the Winning Students scheme, it is also making awards to individual athletes. In the first year of this scheme, 54 sportsmen and women at colleges and universities across Scotland were selected to receive financial help for fees, accommodation, equipment or travel.



In the second year, this is going to increase to just under 100. The aim is to help the athletes progress in their sports careers, whether that's from junior to senior level, from national to international, or from competing to medal-winning.

But there is also a long-term aim behind the scheme, which is to make it easier for them to gain an education off the sports field, so that they are able not only to maximise their chances of sporting success, but also have something to fall back on should they meet sporting failure.

The new northern lights

Anne Giacomantonio talks to four bright young things about studying in Scotland

THE ACTOR

Colin Morgan, 23, studied acting at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow. He is currently filming the second season of the BBC series *Merlin*, in which he plays the lead role.

"One of my secondary-school drama teachers had always recommended the RSAMD as a great place to go for acting. A friend at college who had lived in Glasgow also spoke very highly of it, and after I did a bit of research, I ended up auditioning.

I absolutely loved Glasgow as a city. The course we did was quite full on: we were working nine to six every day. But when we went out, there was no shortage of places to go. Glasgow is one of my favourite cities – whether it's for social events or culture. It's a great place to be a student.

The nature of an acting school and the course is that the work is very practical. We don't have any exams, so you are working quite closely with people and you get to know them. You make friends for life. You are meeting people from all over the world, living and working together. It was great for me as I had never lived away from home before and there are so many people in the same position.

I definitely credit the RSAMD for where I am now. They provide you with the skills you need to be out in the business. One of the most important things they do is set up



international connections, and they try to make sure everyone has an agent by the time you graduate.

For anyone thinking about getting into acting or the industry, it's a great way to explore different aspects. And they have a really good Acting for Camera course that a lot of the other drama schools don't do. You come out feeling very prepared, very ready for such an unpredictable industry.

At the moment, we are only about half way through the eight months of filming, so I'm pretty involved in the *Merlin* bubble."

THE ARTIST

Katie Paterson, 27, took a degree in tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art before doing a Masters at the Slade School of Fine Art. She recently won the £10,000 panel prize of Creative 30, the talent competition run in association with *The Independent*.

"I'm from Glasgow, but chose to study in Edinburgh to move a bit further away – but not too far. There was a wide range of courses at Edinburgh. The course I studied was very open in terms of what kinds of materials/ideas you wanted to work with, lots of one-to-one tuition. It had good facilities and a supportive environment with encouraging tutors. The visual and cultural studies department was very good. I also liked that it was a four-year course, to give plenty of time to settle in and develop work.

My degree course gave me a good grounding in working methods, experience of having exhibitions, writing, talking about my work etc, which helped towards building up a professional practice. I have a lot of fond memories. I met my best friends there ... We lived in a 10-bedroom house, which I believe has now been shut down by the authorities. My friends and I got up to the usual stuff, like fairly boisterous nights out, still managing to get to school early the next day. I also had the chance to travel quite a bit with friends and with the college.

Everyone's experiences of courses and how you approach your time there, what your



personal situations are, are unique. Tapestry worked well for me at that time. I think the department has undergone quite a few changes since I was there – it's now intermedia [art], for example.

I'm currently living in Berlin, working as an artist, making artwork, having group and solo exhibitions. I do some lecturing and talks at conferences and workshops. I am still very close to most of my friends from my degree. Many are living in different parts of the world now, but we travel to see one another. Sometimes it feels like not so much has changed ..."

THE ENTREPRENEUR

Charlie Gilkes, 25, studied politics at Edinburgh University. He is founder and director of Kitts, the London nightclub, and its sister establishment, Barts, a speakeasy.

"Edinburgh was such an amazing place to study. The architecture and wealth of culture is phenomenal. It was also fantastic to be able to escape so easily to the beaches of Gullane or the Highlands.

I had always lived in England and wanted a change of scene. I had often visited Scotland on holiday and wanted to be able to explore it further. Edinburgh University has a great politics department, and the city is so thriving that it seemed like a good choice.

While I don't really use my politics degree in a day-to-day capacity, it taught me a lot about power, differing international cultures and human nature. Having an understanding of these issues has been of great benefit in business. It has improved my discipline and time management skills.

I ran an expanding business during the entire four years I was at Edinburgh and commuted down to my office in London on a weekly basis. To achieve a good degree and keep the business alive simultaneously, I needed to be very organised. It showed me that the more you do, the more you can do, and I learnt to be very productive with my time.



I have extremely fond memories of my time there. Aside from the studying, I made some lifelong friends and had some of the most enjoyable years of my life. The only thing I don't miss is the Arctic climate! But I'd certainly recommend it to anyone I thought was well suited.

Now I am busy running Kitts and Barts. I also work on the marketing of some other luxury brands, such as Jaeger-LeCoultre watches. We're constantly looking at new ventures. The recent economic downturn has created some very exciting opportunities and it's a great time to be a young entrepreneur."

THE OLYMPIAN

Todd Cooper, 26, has an undergraduate degree and a Masters in film and media studies from Stirling University. He represented Great Britain in swimming at the Athens and Beijing Olympics. He also competed in the Manchester and Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

"I moved to Stirling when I was 16 to pursue my swimming career, and then I went on to study at Stirling University. I took a year out in 2004 to go to the Athens Olympics and again in 2008 for the Beijing Olympics.

I have been fortunate in every guise – whether it be swimming or professionally – that the people I have been working with have been sympathetic to my needs.

They took a global approach to improving people. It's not just about athletic or academic commitment solely; it's about bettering yourself as a person. It's about the journey, then the destination. I look back on my time at Stirling very fondly, but the thing is that these things can't happen individually: there are a lot of people I have to thank for helping me.

Retired from swimming in January, and I now have several different caps on. I work for Commonwealth Games Scotland, I've just landed a broadcast journalism placement in sports reporting at the BBC, and I also write for a magazine called *Swimming World*.



I'm just about to start writing a research paper and I do some coaching as well.

Stirling is a very supportive environment that I would definitely encourage people to look to. It's an environment that encourages you to look at the wider picture.

The people are just lovely there. My parents came up for my graduation recently and they were overwhelmed by just how nice the people are and the environment. They said they just didn't know how I was going to leave."