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By the time this issue of Essex Quarterly had appeared, I was expecting to know the way ahead for higher education. In fact there is still much uncertainty. The higher education White Paper, originally expected over the winter, will now not appear until June or July. Government plans to allow private providers to compete more freely, new arrangements for transparency and quality assurance, and the details of future university funding thus remain subject to speculation.

This we do know: the University of Essex, and many other universities, will be proposing a tuition fee of £9,000 to the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). We believe our excellent record on being open to students from any background will convince OFFA that we meet the criteria for charging a fee above £6,000. We want to give our students the best possible education and believe that our approach of quality and investment will continue to be attractive to applicants.

The plethora of universities expecting to charge the maximum fee creates a problem, however. Since the Government will be paying the fees initially, the Treasury’s calculation of the cost of student support may be exceeded by £1 billion. This excess will need to be recovered, perhaps by the withdrawal of student numbers or some mechanism that makes universities contribute to the excess cost.

Planning is very difficult under these circumstances. Would it have been preferable if the whole system had been thought through before any changes were made? Undoubtedly. But the Government’s priority of rapid deficit reduction, and the long lead-in time for the introduction of new fees, meant that the fee decision had to be taken swiftly. The cart is still before the horse: correcting that unfortunate position is the challenge for the next year.

Focus on quality as fees set at £9,000

Tuition fees for UK and European Union undergraduates at the University will be set at £9,000 a year for new entrants in 2012, subject to approval by the Office for Fair Access (OFFA).

In line with many of the UK’s top research intensive universities, Essex’s priority is to provide the highest quality teaching and learning opportunities for its students, and the best possible facilities. Students are taught by world-leading academics, and Essex will invest to maintain its position as one of the UK’s top ten universities for research quality.

The University will also invest significantly in a package of targeted bursaries and scholarships to enable it to continue to support the most able students, regardless of social background, and in further developing its extensive programme of outreach activities for schools and colleges. The University already has an excellent record, exceeding its benchmarks and national averages, in attracting students from low income households and low participation neighbourhoods.

Significant support will also be given to student internships and work placements to help Essex students to obtain graduate career opportunities.

Essex has already embarked on a £200 million-plus building and investment programme across its three campuses, which will continue with a new Student Centre and library extension at Colchester and new library and learning centre at Southend.

designs developed for Elmer Square

Plans for new library, lecture and learning facilities in Southend are taking shape, with building work due to start early next year.

The £26.9 million Elmer Square development is a joint venture by Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, South Essex College and the University.

As well as providing a shared public, University and College library, Elmer Square will provide a café open to the public and the relocated Focal Point Gallery.

University facilities will include a 200-seat lecture theatre, teaching rooms and a learning hub, which will provide IT-enabled group and open study areas and quiet reading areas.

It is hoped to complete the building for the start of the 2013-14 academic year.

The designs were due to go on public display at the Elmer Suite, Southend Campus, on 12 and 13 April, and the planning application will be submitted in May.
Why democracy is good for the world

Continuing unrest in the Middle East and North Africa, in which ordinary men and women have taken to the streets in defiance of often hard-line regimes, has shown the world that democracy remains a prized possession. It is one which we in the West often take for granted. Professor Todd Landman, Director of the Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (IDCR), explains why democracy is good for the world.

Democracy carries with it a series of values and norms that place a primacy on human dignity and equality. Democracies are no worse at overseeing economic growth than non-democratic countries, and are decidedly better at overseeing the quality of economic development in terms of income distribution and human development (itself a measure of per capita income levels, literacy, and longevity). Democracies are less likely to go to war with one another and the presence of democracy in any pair of states lowers the chance they will engage in violent conflict. Democracy also brings ‘domestic peace’ and offers the best solution for the resolution of conflict.

It is upon these and other research findings that the IDCR bases much of its work. By taking such insights from academic research and making it more accessible to the world of policy makers and practitioners, the IDCR seeks to share knowledge in ways that advocates for particular sets of ideas that have firm support in evidence and offer solutions to the many complex challenges the world faces today.

The ‘Arab Revolutions’ of 2011 have raised to high relief the continued appeal of political liberalisation, democracy and human rights. From Tunis to Cairo to Tripoli this ring of ‘least likely’ cases of political transformation has captured the world’s attention for the boldness of the outcry and the speed with which political change has spread.

Although the outcomes remain unclear, the message is not ordinary people want better standards of living and more political freedom in the choice over who rules them and how they rule them. In short, the ‘D’ word has returned to the global political agenda.

Democracy is an ancient concept in theory, but in practice, it has been relatively rare and recent. The twentieth-century saw several ‘waves’ of democracy that spread from Western Europe and North America to Southern Europe in the 1970s, Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, and Eastern Europe, Africa and parts of Asia in the 1990s. By the turn of the twenty-first century, approximately 62 per cent of the world’s countries could be considered at least nominally democratic.

After the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and subsequent attacks in Madrid and London, attention in the so-called ‘old democracies’ shifted away from democracy and human rights to security and anti-terrorism. Many non-democratic allies of the West, including some which are now experiencing popular democratic uprisings, joined the global ‘war on terror’. In 2010 the UK’s new Coalition Government declared its aid and foreign policy would be more focused on conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and political stabilisation.

Democracy, it would seem, had taken a back seat.

But the resurgence in demand for democracy, and with it, other perceived benefits, suggest that the idea has not long been in abeyance and that its universal appeal continues. As we watch the complex political processes unfold in the Middle East and North Africa, it is worth bearing in mind the benefits of democracy.

The Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution (IDCR) draws on the University’s 50-year history of research, training, and practical expertise in democracy, conflict resolution, human rights, justice, and governance.

The IDCR will provide a range of knowledge transfer activities of interest to policymakers, think tanks, non-governmental organisations and private companies.

World-famous architect, and Essex graduate, Daniel Libeskind is charged with designing a flagship new building, at the heart of the University’s Knowledge Gateway, to house the Institute. It will provide space for activities including consultancy and policy advice, training, courses, professional development, accreditation, public events, conferences, experience exchange and networking.

The IDC R is already engaged in a series of projects with national and international partners in the area of parliamentary strengthening, democratic accountability of service delivery, assessing the quality of democratic governance, public security, and training programmes.

Further information is available online at: www.idcr.org.uk
It was the tiniest of head movements but it was enough for the husband to know his wife’s answer was an emphatic “no.”

The question was whether she had had enough of taking part in a ground-breaking experiment into how brainwaves can help people with severe disabilities. After nearly two hours, her husband was sure she wanted a break – but he could not have been further from the truth.

“She was loving taking part in the research,” remembered Dr Palani Ramaswamy, of the University’s School of Computer Science and Electronic Engineering. “She later said the experiment made her feel back in control again for the first time since her stroke.”

The stroke had left the woman paralysed, only able to make eye, facial and slight head movements. Thanks to Dr Ramaswamy she was making music just by thinking.

The trial, a joint project between Dr Ramaswamy and computer-music specialist Eduardo Miranda of the University of Plymouth, helped by Essex PhD student John Wilson, involved using brainwaves to operate a computerised music system. Specifically designed for people who are unable to speak and are paralysed — known as locked-in syndrome — the aim is to process brainwaves to give them more control in communicating with the outside world.

Using electroencephalography (EEG), the patient wore a cap with electrodes which picked up different patterns in the brainwaves depending on what she was looking at on a screen — in this case objects flickering at different frequencies. This “frequency-following effect” was then adapted using control mechanisms related to different musical instruments which the patient operated with her eyes.

“But what made this trial so innovative,” explained Dr Ramaswamy, “was that the intensity of how she was looking at the screen in terms of concentration offered even more control and, in this case, more notes for each instrument.”

After a couple of hours of the trial, which was held at the Royal Hospital for Neuro-disability in London, the patient was able to play a mini orchestra solo, just by brainpower alone. It was a very special moment for the woman and the scientists alike.

“To see her use the system was so exciting, and from my side it felt like a lifetime achievement as I have been doing this type of research for ten years and this was the first time it has actually been tested by someone who is disabled,” added Dr Ramaswamy.

This trial was the first of its kind in the UK and offers real hope for people with severe disabilities to have a better quality of life as the technology could be adapted for a wide range of uses to help them communicate and control their environment.

The findings of this study are published online in the journal Music and Medicine and Dr Ramaswamy is now hoping the trial’s success will attract funding to extend his research even further.

Opening the door to a locked-in world

Communicating with the outside world can be a virtual impossibility for someone who is paralysed and unable to speak. Research conducted by the University of Essex is offering real hope to people trapped by their severe disability.

Although Dr Ramaswamy’s current research focuses on the revolutionary designs of brain-computer interfaces, he has also been developing a system to spell English characters using eye movements and blinks to help create a simpler communication mechanism for paralysed patients. This is motivated by the fact that some “locked-in” patients still retain control of their eye movements. A demo of this system can be found at:

http://csee.essex.ac.uk/staff/palaniappan/EOGInterface2.mpg.

He has also pioneered the development of a new research discipline utilising brain signals as a biometric. The common biometric is the fingerprint but the use of brain signals offers a more fraud-resistant method to identify or authenticate a person’s individuality.

The experimental results have shown the concept to be implementable and he is working to make this technology a reality.

Other projects by Dr Ramaswamy include research into cardiovascular (heart) signals, which has shown that abnormal beats could successfully be detected using a combination of electrocardiogram and blood pressure signals. Frequent occurrence of such beats is life-threatening and accurate detection could potentially save lives.
A different reading of the Americas

The way the literary heritage of the Caribbean interweaves with that of its bordering Latin American nations and the southern United States is the focus of major research at Essex.

American Tropics: Towards a Literary Geography is developing new perspectives on how the literature of the Caribbean and the Americas can be understood.

The scope of American Tropics, which is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, is hugely ambitious. Four academics and two PhD students are identifying trends and themes that stretch from New Orleans in the north across to the Caribbean islands in the east and down to Colombia in the south.

The hope is to break from traditional approaches which are often limited by national boundaries and to frame the work of writers in a wider geographical setting where more than one European power and language has had influence. To achieve this, six case studies have been developed to dig deep into the culture of specific places.

Professor Peter Hulme, Head of the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies, said: “Rather than looking at studying literature from a historical, national or linguistic point of view, we are letting the geography decide the boundaries.”

Professor Hulme, who has been researching the literature of Cuba’s mountainous eastern region known as Oriente, says the diverse literature from a historical, national or linguistic point of view, we are letting the geography decide the boundaries.”

PhD students Jak Peake and Leanne Haynes are both researching Caribbean islands – western Trinidad and St Lucia respectively – trying to map a literary geography from a diverse mix of writing from poetry through to travel writing.

Four books will be published by the team and papers from the 2008 conference will also be published shortly.

Meanwhile the team is looking to organise further seminars in Essex and the Dominican Republic to bring together people from some of the places the American Tropics research has been looking at.

Painting the Caribbean on Friday 6 May and Saturday 7 May will bring together international specialists on Caribbean art and is particularly inspired by Professor Walcott’s love of painting and influence of art in his poetry.

Sex and the Caribbean on Tuesday 3 May will cover issues of gender, sexuality, cosmopolitanism, exoticism and eroticism. It will also feature readings by leading novelists Lawrence Scott and Monique Roffey.

Cuba in the Nineteenth Century on Thursday 5 May will discuss many aspects of Cuban history including the impact of slavery.

The week will start with a chance to hear Professor Walcott’s own work at a special event at the Lakeside Theatre at 3pm on Sunday 30 April.

All events are free to attend. For further information see: www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/american_Tropics.
Judicial review: upholding democracy or too much power?

Does judicial review give judges too much power? Does the process waste public money or is it a vital tool for holding government to account? Professor Maurice Sunkin, leader of a major new project, explains:

A day rarely passes without media comment on a decision made by a public body that is being challenged in the courts through judicial review. Government is not immune from the law and, unsurprisingly, it does not welcome legal challenges.

When held to have acted unlawfully, ministers have accused judges of overstepping their authority and wrongly interfering with decisions taken by elected politicians. In 2003, in response to a judicial review ruling that government could not remove benefits from people who fail to claim asylum as soon as they arrive in Britain, the then Home Secretary David Blunkett said: ‘Frankly, I am personally fed up with having to deal with a situation where Parliament debates issues and judges then overturn them.’

More recently, government has come under scrutiny in proceedings challenging its Building Schools for the Future Programme, and John Prescott has called for a judicial review of the Metropolitan Police’s handling of the News of the World phone hacking scandal.

Other high profile cases have involved anti-terrorism and asylum, challenges to hospital decisions to refuse treatment, and large planning projects such as the extension of Stansted Airport.

Judicial reviews can generate strong and contradictory responses. It can be argued that judges have a role to protect the public interest through judicial review, or, alternatively that they are usurping the sovereignty of Parliament. Policy-makers have claimed that this kind of legal challenge, especially in the current economic climate, wastes public money and distracts public authorities.

Some suggest that judicial review has become a self-serving industry for the benefit of lawyers. But others regard judicial review as a sign of the vitality of the rule of law in the UK that enables ordinary people to hold government to account.

Recent research here at Essex has also suggested that judicial review is actually good for government, leading to improvements in the quality of public services.

It is against this background that we have embarked on the largest empirically-based project on judicial review and its impact ever undertaken in the UK. Funded by the Nuffield Foundation with a grant of more than £220,000, Essex researchers will collaborate with experts at the Public Law Project, a national charity aimed at ensuring that disadvantaged groups have access to public law remedies.

The 27-month project will explore the way public bodies, including government, respond to court decisions and examine what differences, if any, judicial review makes to ordinary claimants. Gaining a sound empirically-based understanding of whether, and how litigation matters to public bodies and claimants is particularly important given current pressures on public spending and the likelihood of cuts to the provision of services and legal financial assistance.

The findings of this project will throw light on wider discussions of the role of the courts and law in our democracy. They will also provide much-needed independent evidence that will be of benefit to all who are engaged in debate about access to justice issues in an age of austerity.

What is judicial review and what will the study involve?

Judicial review is a court proceeding in which a judge reviews the lawfulness of a decision or action made by a public body. It does not involve the court deciding whether the public body has made the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ decision, but whether the correct legal basis has been used in reaching it.

The researchers will examine judicial review court decisions over a 15-month period. They will ask the claimants what they hoped to achieve through litigation and whether it had been achieved, and the public bodies why they chose to defend rather than concede.

They will also investigate what happened in practice following the courts’ decisions, paying particular attention to those cases in which the claimant won.

The researchers will look in-depth at selected case studies examining, among other things, whether other benefits of wider public interest resulted.
Twenty-first century life in Britain

Social scientists, medical researchers and the Government know more than ever about our working lives, relationships, health, finances, neighbourhoods and views on the environment thanks to the first publication from our world-leading study Understanding Society.
News

New watersports club for Colne

A new watersports club on the Colne will offer fresh opportunities for students, staff and members of the public to enjoy a range of activities including sailing, kayaking and windsurfing.

Brightlingsea Waterside Yacht Club (BWYC) will cater for beginners, enthusiasts and experienced sailors, training and waterfront facilities. Keen to encourage newcomers to the water, the club plans to offer taster sessions and coaching schemes and will offer a range of membership options.

The University is investing £15,000 to upgrade its existing waterfront clubhouse and boatyard, which have fallen into disuse in recent years.

Dr Aulay MacKenzie, Dean of Sport, said: “This is a great opportunity to secure a strong and sustainable future for watersports at the University and give our students and staff, as well as members of the public opportunities to discover the Essex coastline.”

The Club is due to open in July. Further information is available at: www.bwyc.co.uk

University of Essex

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Registar to step down

Registrar and Secretary Dr Tony Rich is to step down this summer to become Registrar and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Bristol.

Dr Rich, who joined Essex in 1999, played a key role in the establishment of the University’s Southend Campus and, in partnership with the University of East Anglia, the creation of University Campus Suffolk.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Colin Riordan said: “Tony has been instrumental in forging strong links between the University and the communities of both Colchester and Southend, and has contributed significantly to the University’s strategic development in a period during which it has doubled in size.”

Research

Looking for cancer genes

Scientists from the Department of Biological Sciences have received a £205,000 grant from Cancer Research UK to investigate the early reversible changes in the genes associated with breast cancer development.

This project is part of the larger study conducted in Professor Elena Klenova’s laboratory into the mechanisms of breast cancer development and early diagnosis of the condition.

It is also an example of some of the important research being carried out under the umbrella of the Essex Biomedical Sciences Institute (EBSI), which promotes clinically-relevant health and medical research through collaboration with NHS clinicians.

Despite important advances in the research, treatment and early diagnosis of breast cancer, 12,500 women die every year from the disease in the UK.

The proposed two-year series of events, directed by Dr Ellie Palmer, was highlighted by the Times Higher Education in their spotlight on ten of the winning seminar competition submissions. Speakers at the first seminars in May and July include Professor Richard Susskind OBE, the world’s leading expert on technology and law, and Roger Smith, Director of Justice.

Topics for discussion include the meaning of justice and how justice is supported by the international human rights framework, and implications of providing financial assistance from the public purse. Best speaker papers will be published at the end of the series.

Further information is available at: www.essex.ac.uk/atj/.

Law seminars tackle big issues

The School of Law will launch a prestigious seminar series next month, with leading national and international experts, practitioners and policy makers having secured funding in the Economic and Social Research Council seminar competition.

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Civil War study on loyalty oath

A decisive moment in the build-up to the English Civil War is being researched by a professor from the Department of History.

Professor John Walter says his investigation into the Protestation Oath of 1641 has interesting connections with modern discussions about the state, religious identities and citizenship.

He said: “Whether you were rich or poor you were required to take this oath and one of the consequences was to create a notion of active citizenship amongst the population.”

The Oath was an oath of loyalty to the King, to Parliament and the Church of England which included a vow to defend them ‘against all popery and popish innovations’.

All those aged over 18 had to take the oath and the names of those who declined were recorded.

Professor Walter said the £100,000 study will deliver a “radical new interpretation” of the period.
Future entrepreneurs put through their paces

Head mentor and Essex alumnus Dr Gwyn Jones, who has a reputation for using cutting-edge technology to transform businesses, helped develop the boot camp concept. He said: “It is great to see the genuine enthusiasm of all the students. They are so determined to make their business ideas succeed. I feel the Essex Boot Camp experience is really appreciated by the students and I hope it helps them with the next step on their career by giving them the skills they need and confidence in their own abilities.”

The winning team was Essex store whose members pitched an idea for a student locker storage system. The team will now use the £1,500 prize money to launch a pilot at Essex.

Dr Janice Pitts, Director of the Research and Enterprise Office said: “We want to give our students access to real-life entrepreneurial expertise and experiences. The insight provided by our team mentors was so valuable to our students and will really help them in the future.”

Budget focus for business breakfast

The University is teaming up with Colchester2020 to give regional businesses the chance to delve into the detail of the 2011 Budget. A panel of leading academics and business representatives will discuss the impacts of Chancellor George Osborne’s Budget to “fuel growth” at a free breakfast seminar on the University’s Wivenhoe Park campus. The “Growth, Fairness and Stability - Unpacking the 2011 Budget” event takes place on Friday 6 May from 7.30am to 9.30am in the Lecture Theatre Building.

Chaired by Professor David Crawford, Deputy Director of Enterprise at the University, the event will look at how the budget will impact on businesses and the community, what is driving growth in the eastern region, and how fair and sustainable is this growth at a time of increasing global conflict and uncertainty.

Speakers include Helen Flear, Director, Government and Public Sector, PwC; George Kierfer, Chairman, Haven Gateway Partnership; Professor Prem Sikka, Director, Centre for Global Accountability, Essex Business School and Professor Todd Landman, Director, Institute for Democracy and Conflict Resolution.

Places are limited, to register for this free breakfast event, see: http://unpicking2011budget.eventbrite.com. For further information, please contact Professor David Crawford, telephone: 01206 874495, e-mail: Crawford@essex.ac.uk.

Workshop on cultural understanding

Businesses and academics will focus on social responsibility, cultural understanding and global citizenship at a workshop in Southend on 6 May.

Consiwm will look at the management of cross-cultural collaborations, with speakers including a representative from KPMG. The full-day workshop includes lunch and takes place at the University’s Southend Campus. For more information and online registration, please visit: www.essex.ac.uk/consiwm/.

Getting the most out of social media

Students have been using their online skills to put together cutting-edge marketing strategies using the full power of social media.

The Social Media Case Study Challenge was a partnership between Essex Business School and leadership development and behaviour coaching specialist Główkiewski International.

The Colchester-based company challenged marketing students to come up with proposals to promote the new Youth Główkiewski Predisposition Indicator (GPI2) – an analysis tool designed to help young people to understand their strengths and identify personal development opportunities.

The teams had to put together a project brief, budget, conduct market research and develop a social media plan. The winning team members won vouchers totalling £100 each plus a GPI2 report.

Patrick Hitchen, from Essex Business School, said: “It was fantastic on so many levels. It is great for the business school and our students to be able to work with a local business on a challenge like this.”

“We were really pleased with how well the students responded and Główkiewski was delighted with the work generated.”

Ian Wigram, Managing Consultant – Education at Główkiewski International, said: “The young people we worked with were a real credit to the University. Talking to the students it was apparent they relished the practical nature of the challenge.”
We may all be living longer, but the downside is a dramatic rise in the number of people suffering from dementia.

More than 820,000 people are living with dementia in the UK today, but this will rise to one million in 2025, doubling to two million by 2050. Until now, funding for research into age-related diseases has been the poor relation to spending on cancer and heart disease.

But the enormity of the predicted numbers of people suffering from dementia is starting to increase awareness of the importance of age-related research. As well as the huge personal cost, dementia costs the UK economy £23 billion a year — more than heart disease and cancer combined. With this figure set to rise dramatically in the coming years, the need for greater funding into dementia research is more apparent than ever.

At the heart of helping in the battle against dementia is research, taking the expertise from the lab bench to the bedside.

At the University’s Essex Research into Ageing Unit (ERA), scientists are looking at molecular solutions to age-related dementia.

ERA co-directors Dr Jody Mason and Dr Neil Kad are pooling their unique expertise in applying new techniques and harnessing new technology to seek answers to important questions on age-related diseases. They believe that their approaches will lead to a new class of treatment for diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and Huntington’s.

Without increased support for research the numbers of sufferers is set to increase drastically. Even if we were able to slow the progression of Alzheimer’s by just five years, we would halve the number of people who die with the disease.

The team at the Essex Research into Ageing Unit recently secured funding from Parkinson’s UK to investigate a particular brain protein which is defective in people who suffer from Parkinson’s — a progressive neurological condition which affects about 120,000 people in the UK.

One of the research projects at Essex is looking at the build-up of insoluble protein deposits in nerve cells in the brain which can lead to disease. The build-up of these deposits disrupts the brain’s normal function and interrupts vital communication signals. The project is investigating how these deposits can be broken down.

PhD student Nicola Acerra, who has been involved in the research at ERA, has recently had a close family friend develop advanced Alzheimer’s. He said: “To play a part in research and the potential to find a cure for Alzheimer’s is very close to my heart.”

Fighting the demon of dementia

Our ageing population means dementia is now a major health and social issue in the UK. The importance of this is not lost on scientists at Essex, whose research is helping in the fight against dementia.

Left to right: Raya Zohrabi, Nicola Acerra, Dr Jody Mason and Dr Neil Kad.

PhD student Raya Zohrabi, who is involved in the project, said: “Parkinson’s continues to affect millions of people worldwide, so I think it’s vital that we develop new ways to understand how unhealthy protein build-up can cause nerve cell death.”

The protein is one of several proteins being investigated as part of research into Parkinson’s and this research will involve trying to stop the toxicity caused by the protein which causes healthy cells to die.

PhD student Nicola Acerra, who has been involved in the research at ERA, has recently had a close family friend develop advanced Alzheimer’s. He said: “To play a part in research and the potential to find a cure for Alzheimer’s is very close to my heart.”

This cutting-edge research at Essex could pave the way for future drug treatments which could ultimately slow down the symptoms. With the knock-on effect of offering a better quality of life for sufferers by pushing back the progression of the disease, this research could have a real impact on many people.

For the ERA team, there is real job satisfaction in doing research with the potential to defeat something that affects one in three of us as either a sufferer, carer, or relative.

“These age-related diseases originate from defects at the molecular level, raising the prospect that our research can directly impact the lives of an increasing number of people,” explained Dr Kad.

Since ERA began two years ago, the small but dedicated team has attracted funding from Alzheimer’s Research UK, Parkinson’s UK and Age UK and hosted several eminent speakers.

Our ageing population means dementia is now a major health and social issue in the UK. The importance of this is not lost on scientists at Essex, whose research is helping in the fight against dementia.
The creativity of staff, students, and alumni will be celebrated during the summer term in Arts on 5’s new Homegrown Festival.

The festival – which kicks off with a free, public event with Nobel Laureate and Honorary Graduate Derek Walcott – runs into May and includes theatre, music, interactive shows and children’s events.

Musical members of staff will showcase their talents in The Staff Sessions, featuring everything from African drumming to folk and jazz. New works by members of the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies (LiFTS) will be performed for Student Writers Night while The Directors’ Cut presents plays by alumni producers. LiFTS students also take centre stage in a re-envisioned performance of Macbeth which features music from violinist Dan Merrill, course leader at Colchester Institute.

The Homegrown Festival also draws on creativity from the wider Colchester Community including two site-specific, interactive adventure games designed by Colchester Gazette reporter Neil D’Arcy Jones. Neil has designed campus-inspired The Hidden Campus Quest for adults and Constable’s Cryptic Code for children who will search for clues relating to artist John Constable hidden in the campus landscape. Other highlights include Colchester artist Chris Dobrowolski performing his critically acclaimed show about football and family history Poland 3 Iran 2 at Top Bar, and choreographer Karla Shacklock’s physical theatre works Nobody and Beyond, both developed in residency at the Lakeside Theatre.

At Art Exchange MA Gallery Studies and Critical Curating students will present Timeframe, an exhibition of works that physically decay in real time as well as other photographic and film works by internationally-renowned artists.

For full information about Arts on 5 and the Homegrown Festival, visit: www.essex.ac.uk/artson5. Sign up to the weekly arts mailing list for up-to-date arts news and offers. E-mail: arts@essex.ac.uk. For all events visit: www.essex.ac.uk/events.