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Ewell’s Nescot graduates prove you don’t have to move away to go far

9 February 2026



Over 90 Nescot students gathered at Epsom Downs Racecourse on Friday for their Higher Education Graduation Ceremony, donning caps and gowns to celebrate their success with proud parents, families and tutors.

The event marked a major milestone for students who completed university-level qualifications while studying close to home, proving that higher education doesn’t have to mean moving away to succeed. For many, Nescot offered the best of both worlds: small, supportive classes with expert teaching, alongside the flexibility to continue living with family while balancing study with local work.

Nescot partners with several prestigious universities including Kingston University, the University of Greenwich, the University of West London, The Open University and the University of Arts London (UAL), offering degrees and other university-level qualifications across subjects including healthcare, performing arts, education, art and design, teaching, management and sports science.

Guests of Honour on the day included the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Robert Leach, alongside Nescot honorary fellows Paul Nicholson, former professional darts player, and Jane Wilson-Howarth, world-renowned physician, author and zoologist.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said: “Our higher education graduation ceremony is one of my favourite days of the year. It’s exciting and joyful, but the overwhelming emotion is pride. Students, who’ve put their heart and soul into achieving their qualifications, feel so proud of themselves as they step on stage. Families, who’ve often been there for students every step of the way, burst with pride at what their son, daughter, brother or sister has achieved. There are usually a few tears too, some from our incredible staff who have watched these students persevere, learn and grow and are now waving them off to careers in their chosen fields. Whether you come to us aged 16 or 66, Nescot is a launchpad and I wish all our graduates every success with whatever comes next.”

Students from across the college were fully involved in the ceremony. Travel and tourism students welcomed guests on arrival, music students provided DJ sets and live music throughout, and performing arts students surprised the audience with an incredible singing flashmob.

Guest of honour, Paul Nicholson, gave an inspiring speech, telling students: “What you’ve done to get here is remarkable – you should be extremely proud of yourselves. But by being here you haven’t finished; you’ve only just started. Your ambitions should never have an end date…with the skills and experience Nescot has given you, make our world a little bit better every day.”

Madiha Mahmood who studied for a BA (Hons) in Education Studies gave a speech at the ceremony, including a thank you to lecturers, tutors and support staff at Nescot: “Your dedication, patience, and belief in us, especially during challenging moments, has made a lasting difference. You have guided us, encouraged us, and pushed us to be the best versions of ourselves.

Today is a celebration, but it is also a reminder. A reminder that it doesn’t matter how long it takes. It doesn’t matter if you fail at the start. It doesn’t matter how many people doubt you. If you keep going, you can change your whole story. Congratulations to every graduate here today, we did it!”

No matter which qualification students are working towards, Nescot’s lecturers and tutors are dedicated to helping them reach their full potential. Staff are experienced tutors but also have substantial experience of working in the relevant industry too. Student satisfaction is high, with National Student Survey results showing the college is “significantly above the benchmark” across all 27 categories.

To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

NESCOT

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Rosebery school Epsom puts Henry 8’s six on stage

9 February 2026



An Epsom school brought Broadway and the West End to Surrey last week with a successful run of the musical *‘Six: Teen Edition’*.

The play, which is adapted from the international hit musical *SIX* by Toby Marlow and Lucy Moss, tells the story of the six wives of Henry VIII from their own perspective.

Pupils from Rosebery School, part of GLF Schools, performed at the Leatherhead Theatre from Wednesday 28 January to Friday 30 January 2026, this school-friendly 75-minute version brought history to life as a modern pop concert, filled with humour and bold storytelling.

The high-energy show saw the six Queens reclaim their narratives on stage, each sharing her unique perspective through dazzling numbers and dynamic choreography.

The production celebrated resilience, individuality, and sisterhood with tremendous attitude and empowerment, earning enthusiastic applause from audiences across the run.

This ambitious endeavour united more than 140 students from Rosebery School in roles spanning performance, music, technical production, costume design, and leadership.

Rehearsals began in early October, and the students demonstrated exceptional commitment, collaboration, and teamwork throughout the production.

The production featured a fully student-run backstage team handling stage management, wardrobe, makeup, and technical operations, as well as a talented student choreographer who shaped the Queens’ movement with creativity and confidence.

The Senior Prefect Team also took part, spearheading a fundraising campaign to support performing arts at Rosebery.

The production also showcased outstanding cross-curricular collaboration. Bespoke costumes were designed by A-Level fashion and textiles students, blending historical influences with contemporary flair. A-Level design and technology students engineered the show’s thrones, with music performed by members of the school band.

David Lach, headteacher at Rosebery School, praised the joint efforts of everyone involved in the production. He said:

“This is a truly homemade production, and a distinctively Rosebery production too. From the thrones crafted by our students, to the choreography to the outfits worn, our students have well and truly put their stamp on *Six*.

“The end result was a remarkable performance, blending education and history with contemporary flair and messages of resilience and independence. Huge congratulations to everyone who took part, and thank you to all our wider community who supported us.”

James Nicholson, interim CEO of GLF Schools, saw the production last week. He said: “I was hugely impressed with Rosebery’s production, which showed great talent, professionalism and imagination. Everyone who took part is a huge credit to the school, and the wider GLF family.”

Release on behalf of GLF schools

Photo: Credit: Simon Drake Photography

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A recipe for success – Dame Prue Leith visits Ewell's Nescot

9 February 2026



Dame Prue Leith DBE visited students at Nescot college in Epsom today, to share her experience, expertise and enthusiasm with students, including the next generation of culinary talent.

Prue, a chef, author and founder of Leiths Education, as well as a broadcaster and former judge on 'The Great British Bake Off', met students and staff and toured Nescot's award-winning catering and cookery facilities. She also watched students in action, chatting to them as they prepared some of her own recipes in the college's professional kitchens.

During the visit, Prue spoke about her incredible life, during an 'in conversation' session attended by around 250 students from business, catering, art and design, healthcare and media courses. The session, facilitated by Nescot's CEO and Principal, Julie Kapsalis, included questions about setting up her cookery school, her writing career, including her new book due out in February, and how she moved into broadcasting. Prue also shared personal anecdotes from her time on TV and highlighted the importance of healthy eating and nutrition, an area she has previously advised the government on.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot said "Although many of our students know her from the Bake Off, Prue is a powerhouse business leader, an amazing chef, an author and an educator. Her career is an incredible demonstration of how with determination, resilience and hard work, one person can achieve across several fields. Our Professional Cookery students loved showing her their skills and I know they appreciated her advice, which no doubt they'll refer to when they're running kitchens of their own. Prue has shown our students that the sky's the limit – we're so grateful for her time."

Prue Leith said "Nescot is amazing! Truly professional, caring teachers and enthusiastic students."

As well as Professional Cooking qualifications, Nescot offers a wide range of courses for school leavers and adults, including Animal Care, Hair & Beauty, Computing and IT, Construction, Performing Arts, Childcare and Health & Social Care. To find out more about studying at Nescot call 020 8394 3038, visit www.nescot.ac.uk or email adviceteam@nescot.ac.uk

NESCOT

Prue with Julie Kapsalis CEO and students in the Nescot professional kitchens.

Royal visit to Surrey University

9 February 2026



On 28 January, HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh and the University of Surrey's Chancellor, HRH The Duke of Kent, visited Surrey to celebrate the University's innovation, research and hands on learning. During their visit, they met students and staff from across campus, gaining insight into Surrey's multidisciplinary approach to education.

Medical students at the first and only medical school in Surrey met The Duchess of Edinburgh to demonstrate the

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collaborative training that will shape their careers in the NHS. The Duchess returned to the University of Surrey's Kate Granger Building six years after she opened it as the home of its School of Health Sciences. Her Royal Highness met some of the University's first cohort of UK government-funded medical students who began their studies in September 2025.

The Duchess also met medical, nursing, midwifery and paramedic students learning together in the collaborative training wards before joining a virtual reality anatomy teaching session.

The University's Chancellor, The Duke of Kent, joined her Royal Highness at the Surrey Space Centre, where they visited labs to see a student-designed satellite deploy pod which will push a payload from a rocket into space.

At the Space Centre, The Duchess visited the satellite clean room toured by Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in 1998. In the clean room, Her Royal Highness helped to fit a panel engraved with Their Royal Highnesses' Royal Cyphers to Jovian-1, a satellite which Surrey students helped develop.

Schoolchildren who took part in the University's widening participation summer schools returned to campus to show off the hands-on STEM projects they enjoyed last year, with The Duke and Duchess joining in. Students from the University's Engineering Design Centre also had the opportunity to show His Royal Highness a range of projects, including rocket designs and Formula E racing cars.

Professor Stephen Jarvis, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Surrey, said:

"Training medical students alongside nursing, midwifery and paramedic students reflects how the NHS operates in practice. Our students graduate already equipped to work effectively in multidisciplinary teams, rather than having to learn this solely once they enter the workplace. The Duchess saw this first-hand in our training wards, where students from different disciplines learn together in realistic clinical settings.

"Her Royal Highness also saw our engineering students working on satellites they have designed and built themselves – hardware that will ultimately be launched into orbit. That combination of world-class research and practical, employer-ready skills lies at the heart of what we do. For our students, whether still studying or already well into their careers, having two members of the Royal Family witness this work first-hand is an experience they will long remember. It was a truly memorable day for our entire community."

The visit marked a return to sites with strong royal connections. Queen Elizabeth II visited the University's Guildford campus three times during her 70-year reign: in 1992, where she inaugurated the University's Centre for Satellite Engineering Research; 1998, when she once again paid a visit to the Surrey Space Centre; and in 2015, when she opened Surrey's School of Veterinary Medicine.

Patrick Degg, Vice-President, Global at the University of Surrey, said:

"We thank both The Duchess of Edinburgh and The Duke of Kent for their continued support for Surrey. The Duke has served as our Chancellor since June 1976. To have him return in this 50th year of his Chancellorship alongside The Duchess, and for them both to see the breadth of the research and teaching Surrey delivers has been a moment of collective pride.

"A programme that took in our pioneering space engineering, our new medical school and other aspects of our multidisciplinary research and teaching, spoke to the transformation The Duke has witnessed and championed throughout his tenure. His presence continues to inspire our community and affirm the values at the heart of this institution."

About Surrey Space Centre

Since its founding in 1979, the Surrey Space Centre has been a leading space engineering hub and is widely seen as the birthplace of the small satellite revolution. Professor Sir Martin Sweeting spun out Surrey Satellite Technologies Limited from his work at the Centre, and its recent missions have included RemoveDEBRIS, which demonstrated ways to capture debris in orbit.

The University recently announced the creation of the Surrey Space Institute, which brings together expertise across engineering, law, biosciences and artificial intelligence to build skills, partnerships and future space missions – with a particular focus on protecting Earth's resources and critical orbital infrastructure.

Surrey University

HRH The Duchess of Edinburgh looking at a picture of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at the University of Surrey. Credit Surrey University

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Ex-Gendarme launches Epsom safety awareness programme for children

9 February 2026

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A new safety awareness programme for children has been launched in **Epsom** by former French armed police officer Xavier Vollin, who now works in the UK as a close protection officer for foreign diplomats and a behavioural detection instructor. Mr Vollin, who was awarded a Medal for Bravery during his police service, has more than 25 years' frontline experience in law enforcement, personal protection and behavioural analysis. He also trains colleagues in recognising early warning signs and behavioural anomalies in everyday environments. The initiative, developed under his training company XavSafety, is currently being piloted with children aged 9 to 13, with plans to expand to older teenagers and adults.

Seeing what others miss

Mr Vollin said that much traditional safety advice focuses on what to do once a situation has already gone wrong, whereas his approach concentrates on what happens before that point, helping participants notice changes in behaviour, inconsistencies in surroundings and subtle cues that may signal emerging risk. The programme emphasises calm awareness, observation and environmental understanding rather than confrontation or fear-based thinking. It is described as helping children "see what others miss", while remaining age-appropriate, engaging and accessible. Mr Vollin said the aim is not to turn children into "mini security officers", but to help them become more present, confident and aware of how people and environments can change around them.

Pilot programme underway in Epsom

The initial six-week programme began in early January 2026 and has deliberately been kept small to allow the format to be refined and adapted before wider rollout. Sessions combine practical exercises with elements of behavioural observation and pattern recognition, presented in a way intended to remain playful rather than intimidating. Early feedback from parents and children has been positive, although images and evaluation material are currently limited while the pilot phase continues. Future developments are expected to include programmes for older teenagers and adults, exploring the same core skills in greater depth, and Mr Vollin intends to formalise the framework and pursue CPD accreditation.

Focus on awareness in a digital age

Mr Vollin said the wider purpose of the project is to help young people reconnect with their surroundings at a time when attention is increasingly absorbed by screens. He described the underlying idea as being less about strength or reaction, and more about presence, understanding people and recognising risk early, before reaction becomes the only option. The programme is currently launching locally in Epsom, with potential for expansion depending on demand and community interest. Further details about the initiative can be found on the XavSafety website.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Students Tuesday takeover of Epsom Picturehouse

9 February 2026



Students from **University for the Creative Arts** (UCA) in Epsom are set to return to **Epsom Picturehouse** later this month with another imaginative cinema takeover – this time built around the release of *Marty Supreme*.

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The one-night event takes place on **Tuesday 20th January**, with activities beginning at **6.30pm**, and forms part of UCA Epsom's *Experience Economy* module. Rather than focusing on conventional event mana

The January screening will again see students working directly with the Picturehouse team to create an enhanced, interactive evening that goes beyond simply watching a film. While full details are being kept under wraps, organisers promise live elements and audience interaction designed to complement the themes and setting of the film.

The collaboration builds on last year's well-received student takeover, which re-imagined *Be Kind Rewind* as a playful, hands-on cinema experience. That event featured live performances, green-screen activities and interactive installations that transformed the building into a temporary creative hub and demonstrated how cinema can function as a shared social space rather than a purely passive one.

This year's focus is *Marty Supreme*, a new film set in 1950s New York and starring **Timothée Chalamet** as Marty Mauser, a driven outsider determined to become a champion table-tennis player and turn the sport into a nationwide phenomenon. The story's emphasis on confidence, ambition and refusing to be overlooked has provided fertile ground for students developing ideas around performance, identity and audience participation.

Epsom Picturehouse, which opened in 2018, has become a central part of the town's cultural life, combining six screens showing independent cinema and mainstream releases with a café-bar that is used for talks, community events and special screenings. The venue is part of the Picturehouse chain, known nationally for its focus on curated programming and local partnerships.

UCA's Epsom campus, located at the former Epsom School of Art, specialises in creative business, marketing and performance-related courses, with an emphasis on practical collaboration with external organisations. Projects such as the Picturehouse takeover form part of the university's wider approach to linking students with real-world audiences and venues.

Joe Stroud, Marketing Manager at Epsom Picturehouse, said the partnership reflects a shared commitment to creativity and community, adding that working with students brings fresh perspectives into the cinema and helps re-imagine how audiences experience film.

The *Marty Supreme* cinema takeover is a **one-night-only** event, with tickets available via the Picturehouse website.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Surrey Uni powering hydrogen and low carbon energy

9 February 2026



A new partnership between the University of Surrey and leading clean energy technology company Ceres aims to speed up the development of next-generation clean power systems and hydrogen production – supporting the UK's net zero ambitions and helping address a growing skills gap in electrochemical energy technologies.

The collaboration brings together Ceres' expertise in solid oxide fuel cells (SOFC) and solid oxide electrolysis (SOEC) with Surrey's research strengths in electrochemical energy systems, digital and multiscale modelling, and advanced materials characterisation. Solid oxide electrolysis allows for highly efficient hydrogen production using electricity and heat, while solid oxide fuel cells can generate low carbon power for applications ranging from industrial processes to data centres.

Under the partnership, the teams will focus on improving the efficiency, durability and performance of these technologies, using advanced modelling and mechanistic insights to help translate fundamental research into real-world systems more quickly. Together, they will pursue joint research projects, collaborative funding bids and new training and placement opportunities for students.

Professor Qiong Cai, Professor in Sustainable Energy and Materials at the University of Surrey, and academic co-lead, said:

"Solid oxide electrolysis and fuel cells have huge potential to underpin the UK's future energy systems, from large-scale

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hydrogen production to low-carbon power for industry. But real progress depends on improving efficiency, durability and performance so these systems can operate reliably in the real world. This partnership gives us the opportunity to tackle those challenges head-on, combining fundamental science with a clear route to application."

Professor Jin Xuan, Associate Dean of Research and Innovation for the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences, who is also a co-lead at Surrey, said:

"There is a growing skills gap in hydrogen and electrochemical energy technologies, at a time when demand for these capabilities is increasing rapidly. Working together with Ceres, we aim to help train the next generation of engineers and scientists in these fields through placements and hands-on research, ensuring the UK has the expertise it needs to support a net zero economy."

The partnership is outlined by a three-year Heads of Terms agreement and will see the teams work together to develop a pipeline of joint research projects and funding bids.

A symbolic signing ceremony, which took place at the University of Surrey on 14 January 2026, formally marked the start of the collaboration and provided an opportunity for both parties to set out priorities for the work ahead.

Dr Subhasish Mukerjee is Chief Scientific Officer at Ceres and was recently appointed a Visiting Professor within Surrey's School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering. He said:

"We are delighted to expand our collaboration with the University of Surrey across fundamental electrochemistry research, modelling and digitalisation, and strategic testing to develop the next generation of clean energy technology. This collaboration strengthens our leadership in the solid oxide field and supports the UK's drive toward achieving its net zero targets."

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Surrey University

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From the Cosmos to Commerce: University of Surrey Leads the Way

9 February 2026



The University of Surrey has been showcasing a remarkable breadth of achievement in recent weeks, with major advances announced across fundamental science, international collaboration, digital trade policy and lifetime academic excellence.

From unlocking the origins of the universe's rarest elements, to shaping the future of UK trade infrastructure and celebrating world-leading research careers, the University's latest announcements underline its growing national and international impact.

Unlocking the universe's rarest elements

Surrey scientists are leading a new £215,100 international research project that aims to transform understanding of how chemical elements are formed during extreme cosmic events such as supernovae, neutron-star collisions and X-ray bursts.

Funded by the Royal Society's International Science Partnership Fund, the three-year project brings together researchers from Surrey, Kyushu University and Japan's world-leading RIKEN laboratory. The team will develop and deploy cutting-

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edge instruments capable of measuring some of the rarest and most unstable atomic nuclei ever studied.

These exotic isotopes do not exist naturally on Earth and can only be created briefly in advanced physics laboratories. By measuring their mass and decay rates for the first time, researchers hope to refine theoretical models of nuclear structure and gain new insight into how the heaviest elements in the universe are formed.

Experiments will take place at RIKEN's Rare-Radioactive Isotope Ring, a unique facility that allows repeated observation of these short-lived nuclei. Surrey researchers will play a central role, leading the design and testing of advanced detector and data-acquisition systems in the UK ahead of the experimental programme in Japan.

The collaboration is also expected to strengthen scientific ties between the UK and Japan and reinforce the UK's position at the forefront of nuclear physics research.

Warning over UK digital trade and border fragmentation

In a very different field, new research from Surrey Business School and the Centre for the Decentralised Digital Economy has issued a stark warning that the UK risks falling behind global competitors in digital trade unless urgent action is taken.

The study argues that the UK's digital border initiatives are fragmented, with no single organisation responsible for coordinating legislation, technology platforms and end-to-end border processes. As a result, businesses face repeated data requests, delays and uncertainty, increasing costs rather than reducing friction.

Researchers examined UK trade and border policies since 2017, including the 2025 UK Border Strategy, recent digital trade legislation and multiple government pilot projects. Drawing on international case studies and academic research, the team proposes a collaborative governance framework to guide reform.

The report calls for the government to give one body a clear mandate to orchestrate policy, digital platforms and data standards across departments. It argues that, with the right leadership, the UK has a window of opportunity to create a new digital "silk road" for trade, enabling trusted data sharing that benefits smaller firms as well as multinationals.

Lifetime achievement recognised in materials science

Surrey's excellence in research was further highlighted by the announcement that Professor Joseph Keddie, Professor of Soft Matter Physics, has been awarded the 2026 Sir Eric Rideal Award for lifetime achievement in colloid and interface science.

Jointly awarded by the Royal Society of Chemistry and the Society of Chemical Industry, the prestigious honour recognises sustained and distinguished contributions to the field. Professor Keddie is internationally known for pioneering work on polymer colloids, sustainable materials and so-called "living materials", with applications ranging from coatings and adhesives to wastewater treatment and bioremediation.

Over a career spanning more than three decades, he has authored more than 150 academic publications, holds multiple patents and co-authored the influential book *Fundamentals of Latex Film Formation*. His work at Surrey has previously been recognised by major awards from both the Institute of Physics and the Royal Society of Chemistry.

Professor Keddie will deliver the Rideal Lecture, titled *More than Watching Paint Dry*, on 8 April 2026, presenting highlights from his research including self-layering coatings and carbon-storing "living paints".

A university with global reach

Taken together, the announcements paint a picture of a university operating at the cutting edge across disciplines: advancing fundamental science on a global stage, influencing national policy debates, and nurturing research careers with lasting international impact.

For Surrey residents, the achievements reinforce the University of Surrey's role not only as a local institution, but as a centre of innovation and expertise with reach far beyond Guildford.

Sam Jones – Reporter



Epsom Christmas carols of two colleges and a council

9 February 2026

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In the first and a unique festive venture for the Borough of Epsom Ewell a special carol service was held in the Chapel of St Luke, Epsom College this evening. Organised on the joint initiatives of Julie Kapsalis (CEO NESCOT), Jackie King (CEO Epsom and Ewell Borough Council) and Mark Lascelles (Head of Epsom College).

The event brought local choirs together including NESCOT's own choir, singers from Epsom College and the local Ukrainian choir Renaissance.

Solos were sung by Evie Kingsley, Sienna-Leigh Campbell, Benedict Raper and Caleb Mangatal-Francis.

Julie Kapasalis read from the Gospel of St Matthew 2: 1-12 and Jackie King recited her own reading "The Heart of Christmas", reprinted below.

The service was officiated with humour and aplomb by The Reverend Canon Andrew Haviland.

Epsom Racecourse supported the service.

And no less a figure than the Worshipful Mayor of Epsom and Ewell, Cllr Robert Leach (RA Nonsuch) accompanied the congregation on the magnificent Chapel organ and played the processional at the end J.S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in F from his book of 8 preludes and fugues.

The carol service was an uplifting beginning for many to the festive season and promises have been made to make it a regular feature in the Borough in future years.

Lionel Blackman



The Heart of Christmas

There are so many ways to tell the story of Christmas.
Some begin with angels, some with gifts, some with the hush of falling snow.
But however the story starts, it always finds its way to one place-
the warmth we share when we come together.

Christmas is found in the quiet moments:
in the smell of something baking,
the sound of wrapping paper being carefully – or not so carefully – torn,
in the giggles of children who can't quite sleep,
and in the gentle nod of someone who's seen many Christmases before.

It's in the messages sent to far-off friends,
the unexpected kindness from a neighbour,
the extra chair pulled up to the table,
and the thought that maybe – just maybe –
there is more that connects us than divides us.

And in this season of gathering and giving.
we also pause for a moment to hold in our hearts
those who are not with us tonight-
loved ones we remember with tenderness,
and friends or family who are far away.

We think of Christmases past –
of laughter spilling across the table,
carols sung a little off-key,
hands held during snowy walks,
stories told beside the glow of the tree.
Those moments, though now memories,
are treasures we carry with us –
poignant reminders of love shared,
and joyful times that shaped who we are.
Their voices may have quietened,
but their light has not dimmed.

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It lives in our hearts,
woven into every song, every smile, every candle we light.

Distance and time may keep us apart,
and for some, separation comes through hardship or conflict.
Tonight, we think of them too –
those far from home,
those seeking safety,
those waiting for peace.
May they feel the warmth of the world's compassion
and know that they are not forgotten.

For love is wonderfully stubborn;
it travels in our thoughts, in our stories,
and in the quiet spaces where we still feel their presence.
Each memory, each name whispered with a smile,
becomes part of the light that surrounds us now.

For some, Christmas means faith.
For others, it means family, friendship, or the turning of the year.
But for all of us, it can mean light-
the light we share when we care,
when we welcome,
when we choose to hope.

So tonight, as the music rises and the candles glow,
may we remember what truly makes this season shine:
not the decorations or the presents,
but the people-
those beside us,
those we miss,
and those we have yet to meet.

Because the heart of Christmas is not found under a tree –
it's found in us,
in every act of kindness,
every hand extended,
every loving thought that crosses the miles or the years.

For when we give, include, and love-
we keep the heart of Christmas alive.

Jackie King



Neurodiversity good for business Surrey study shows

9 February 2026



Businesses and policymakers risk missing out on workforce potential by misunderstanding neurodiverse conditions and the biological differences that shape entrepreneurial strengths, according to new research led by the University of Surrey. Instead of considering ADHD, dyslexia and bipolar conditions only as static clinical challenges, researchers build on the existing entrepreneurship literature to argue that these conditions can equip people with unique abilities that drive entrepreneurial action, innovation, and business growth.

In a study, published in Neurodiversity in Entrepreneurship, researchers carried out a systematic review of scientific evidence published between 2011 and 2023, mapping 139 papers and 28 core studies across business and management.

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Importantly, they focused on using organisational neuroscience evidence, spanning from brain activations to genetic mechanisms linked to ADHD, dyslexia and bipolar conditions.

Researchers found evidence that entrepreneurs with ADHD often show high entrepreneurial alertness and strong performance in innovation and risk taking. Dyslexic entrepreneurs may instead compensate for reading and writing challenges by developing advanced delegation strategies to accelerate business growth. Meanwhile, traits linked to bipolar conditions correlate with creativity, idea generation and willingness to pursue bold ventures.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro, co-author of the study and Associate Professor (Reader) of Organisational Neuroscience at the University of Surrey, said:

"We often behave as if neurodiversity automatically means a deficit. The biological evidence shows something completely different. These conditions span a continuum and there is strong evidence that in entrepreneurial contexts they bring valuable strengths. Simply put, we need to stop treating them as problems to be fixed."

The research advocate for a shift in how businesses support programmes and employers view neurodiversity. It argues for business environments that value difference rather than seeking to normalise it and calls for practical organisational strategies that actively harness neurodiverse strengths. The study also highlights policy implications, noting that entrepreneurial settings can provide pathways to work and equality for people who are often miscategorised as unemployable.

Dr Sebastiano Massaro continued:

"To the best of our knowledge, we are presenting the first grounded explanation of why neurodiversity matters in business by drawing a direct connection between neural mechanisms and entrepreneurial behaviour. If universities, industry and governments overlook how these biological foundations impact entrepreneurship, they might miss valuable capability hidden in plain sight."

Surrey University

Epsom celebrity visits his old college

9 February 2026



Joe Wicks MBE, widely known as The Body Coach, recently visited his former college, Nescot (North East Surrey College of Technology), the place where his journey into fitness and education began. His visit to Nescot was filled with inspiration, energy and memorable moments.

Joe was warmly welcomed by Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis, students and staff to the college. He toured the Nescot Fitness centre where Julie proudly presented him with a commemorative plaque, 'Joe's Gym' in his honour. He also signed copies of his bestselling cookbooks for staff and the college's Learning Resources Centre and was delighted to receive his original college lanyard and a thoughtful gift from the college.

Students from our Sport, Public Services and Foundation Learning courses joined Joe in the sports hall for an unforgettable workout session. Joe led the students in a fun and energetic routine, sharing his passion for fitness and wellbeing.

Sports students, Patrick and Nathan shared their thoughts on meeting Joe. Patrick said, "It's been a huge honour meeting Joe who's done so much for fitness, inspiring young kids at an early age and even raising money for charity. A good day for Nescot too." Nathan added, "It's incredible to meet Joe who's a household name and who's been to the same college as me!"

Joe's visit continued in the college theatre, where he took part in a packed Q&A session hosted by Julie Kapsalis. Staff and students gathered to hear about Joe's incredible journey and his time at Nescot.

Joe Wicks, who completed a National Diploma in Sport at Nescot in 2002, spoke warmly about his time at the college, "Nescot started me on my journey to education. The college helped me to grow and mature, and to be more independent as a learner." Speaking candidly to the students, he encouraged them to persevere, "Always try your hardest and put your heart into what you do. It won't always be easy, but never give up – give it your all."

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Nescot Principal and CEO, Julie Kapsalis, said, “It has been a privilege to welcome Joe Wicks, The Body Coach, back to his hold college. His visit was particularly meaningful as his journey began here at Nescot, and we are so proud that his time here laid the foundation for a thriving career in fitness, exercise and nutrition. A huge thank you to Joe for taking the time to inspire our community with his message to stay ‘Fitter, Happier and Healthier’. We look forward to welcoming him back again in the future.”

At the end of the Q&A session, Julie Kapsalis presented Joe Wicks with a Nescot Honorary Fellowship, the highest accolade that the college can bestow, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to fitness, wellbeing and nutrition education, and his mission to improve the nation’s health.

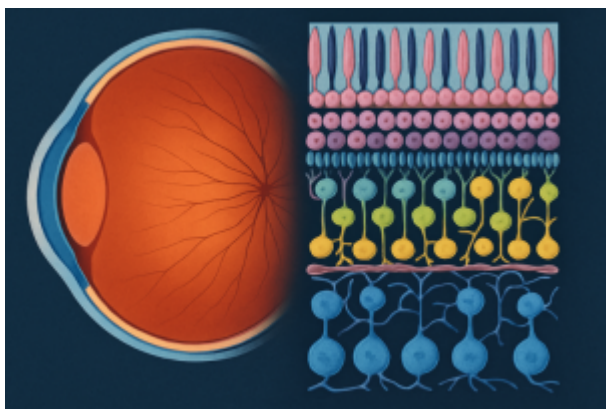
Nescot’s NVQ Catering and Hospitality students also presented Joe with a cheque for £300 in support of his charity, The Body Coach Foundation. They fundraised by preparing and selling meals inspired by his recipes. The visit concluded with excited students lining up for a group selfie and reflecting on how Joe’s message of resilience and ambition left a lasting impression.

To learn more about Joe Wicks’ journey and his time at Nescot, visit our alumni feature on our website

NESCOT

Surrey Uni study may show way to reverse vision loss

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New computer modelling could help scientists better understand how the retina regenerates, opening the door to new treatments for vision loss, according to a study from the University of Surrey.

The first-of-its-kind model is capable of detailing how the retina – the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye – can build its complex structure from just one type of stem cell, deepening our understanding of how sight develops and how its development could inform studies of injury or disease.

Using advanced agent-based modelling, the research team have simulated key stages of retinogenesis – the process by which identical progenitor cells diversify into the six types of neurons that make up the retina.

The model shows how simple genetic rules and subtle randomness work together to form the retina’s precise layered architecture, a structure essential for how we see.

The paper was presented at IWWBIO 2025 and published in Lecture Notes in Computer Science (LNCS).

Cayla Harris, lead researcher from the University of Surrey’s Nature Inspired Computing and Engineering Group, said:

“The beauty of biology is that complex structures can emerge from simple rules. Our simulations show how genetically identical cells can, through intrinsic bias and chance, self-organise into the retina’s highly ordered layers – a pattern that underpins how we see the world.”

Using the BioDynaMo software platform, the team modelled virtual “cells” that grow, divide and make fate decisions based on internal gene-regulation logic, mimicking biological behaviour. They tested different network designs for how genes might interact when cells decide what kind of neuron to become.

Two particular designs – called the Reentry and Multidirectional models – reproduced real biological data most accurately, suggesting that retinal cells may make their fate decisions through overlapping and flexible genetic pathways, rather than a fixed sequence.

This approach could help researchers better understand not only healthy eye development but also what happens in retinal diseases and in regenerative research exploring how stem cells might rebuild tissue.

Dr Roman Bauer, senior author on the study from the University of Surrey, added:

“Computational modelling gives us a powerful way to explore biological processes we can’t easily observe in real time. By simulating every cell’s decision and interaction, we can test hypotheses about how tissues like the retina form – and how to restore them when damaged.”

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This research is supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

Cayla Harris added:

“We think that our research is a step forward in linking genetics, computation and developmental biology to understand one of the body’s most complex neural structures.”

Surrey University

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