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Kirby Fans Pack the Kerb in Epsom

10 April 2026

Children’s author Katie Kirby drew crowds to Waterstones Epsom today Friday 10th, as families queued more than 100 metres along the High Street for a book signing on the final day of the Easter school holidays.

In bright spring sunshine, parents and excited children waited patiently for their chance to meet the bestselling writer, whose hugely popular *Lottie Brooks* series has become a staple for young readers across the UK. Staff at the store reported a steady flow throughout the day, with the queue stretching well beyond the shop frontage at its peak.

Kirby, a former primary school teacher turned full-time author and illustrator, has built a devoted following with her humorous and relatable books aimed at middle-grade readers. Her breakout success, *The Extremely Embarrassing Life of Lottie Brooks*, was shortlisted for major children’s book awards and has sold in significant numbers, with subsequent titles cementing her reputation as one of the UK’s leading voices in children’s fiction.

Epsom school student Ellie with her mother and the author

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Epsom school student Rosie Gordon with the author

Her stories, told in diary format, capture the awkwardness and comedy of growing up, striking a chord particularly with readers aged 8 to 12. The blend of cartoon-style illustrations and accessible writing has helped drive strong sales both in bookshops and through school reading programmes.

Today's event reflected that popularity. Children clutching copies of Kirby's books chatted animatedly in the queue, while parents described the visit as a highlight of the holidays. Inside, Kirby signed books and spoke briefly with readers, creating what one attendee described as "a really special moment" for young fans.

Booksellers say such events have become increasingly important in encouraging children to read for pleasure. The turnout in Epsom suggests that, despite digital distractions, the appeal of meeting a favourite author—and taking home a signed copy—remains as strong as ever.

Lionel Blackman

Local girl made good. The rise of NESCOT's Julie Kapsalis

10 April 2026

Julie Kapsalis, CEO and Principal at Nescot college in Epsom, has achieved a remarkable trio of prestigious awards – including an MBE – in recognition of her leadership, dedication, and outstanding contribution across the region.

Julie's year of accolades began with national recognition in the King's 2026 New Year's Honours List, celebrating her transformative work as Chair of the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) from 2020–2025. During her tenure, Julie championed and delivered major investments in skills, infrastructure and business support, playing a pivotal role in strengthening the region's economic landscape. This week, Julie was presented with her MBE for Services to Economic Development by His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales at Windsor Castle.

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The success didn't stop there. At the Gatwick Diamond Business Awards on 19 March, Dee Mathieson, Chair of the Gatwick Diamond Business Council, presented Julie with the Outstanding Contribution to the Gatwick Diamond Award — a special accolade widely celebrated by colleagues, partners, and all who have worked with her. The citation shared: *"Over the span of two decades Julie's career in economic development, skills enterprise and inclusive growth has made her one of the region's most influential and transformative leaders. For her exceptional leadership, her sustained dedication to the region, and the tangible, lasting positive impact of her work, Julie is a profoundly deserving winner."*

Rounding off an extraordinary week, Julie was also named 'Gamechanger of the Year' at the Dynamic Business Awards in Brighton on 26 March. The award celebrates businesswomen who deliver significant, positive change within their industries — something Julie has consistently demonstrated through her bold leadership, commitment to innovation, and passion for skills development.

Julie Kapsalis, CEO & Principal at Nescot said: *"I love working in this incredible region, building networks and (hopefully) making a difference. This recognition and the awards are shared with the wonderful colleagues I've worked with over the last 25 years including at Nescot, Chichester College Group and Coast to Capital LEP. Meeting the Prince of Wales was such a proud moment – and made all the more special by having my family with me."*

NESCOT

Surrey University designs new long-life battery

10 April 2026

A new battery design that could significantly extend the range of electric vehicles and the lifespan of portable electronics has been developed by researchers at the University of Surrey's Advanced Technology Institute (ATI).

In a study published in ACS Applied Energy Materials, researchers introduce a novel lithium-ion battery anode that delivers some of the highest energy storage capacities reported for silicon–carbon nanotube systems, while maintaining stability over hundreds of charge cycles.

Lithium-ion batteries power much of modern technology – from smartphones and wearables to electric vehicles. Graphite, the most commonly used anode material, is stable but limited in the amount of energy it can store. Silicon, on the other hand, offers far greater capacity, but it expands during charging, causing it to crack and degrade over time.

To overcome this, the research team developed a new "Vertically Integrated Silicon–Carbon Nanotube" (VISiCNT) structure. The design grows dense forests of carbon nanotubes directly onto copper foil and coats them with a thin layer of silicon, creating a flexible, conductive scaffold that can absorb expansion while maintaining performance.

The resulting anode can store a very large amount of energy for its weight. In laboratory tests, it stored more than 3500 milliampere-hours per gram – close to the maximum possible for silicon and far higher than the graphite (370 mAh/g) used in today's batteries. It also demonstrated improved stability and performance over repeated charge cycles.

Dr Muhammad Ahmad, Research Fellow at the University of Surrey's ATI and lead author of the study, said:

"There's been a growing push for battery innovation, as many of today's technologies are limited by how much energy batteries can store. Our VISiCNT design offers a practical route to harness silicon's huge storage capability without sacrificing cycle life.

"This is a much-needed breakthrough, delivering very high capacity, fast charging and long-term durability, while bringing us closer to batteries that can power electric vehicles and everyday devices for much longer on a single charge."

A key advantage of the new approach is that the carbon nanotubes are grown directly onto copper – the material already used in commercial batteries – using a scalable manufacturing process. This could make it easier to integrate the technology into existing industrial production lines.

Professor Ravi Silva, Principal Investigator and Director of the ATI, said:

"This work is an important step towards bringing CNT-silicon anodes out of the lab and into real-world manufacturing. We can grow carbon nanotube structures directly onto copper foil at speed and tailor the silicon layer for stability, meaning this approach could be integrated into existing battery production lines with minimal disruption. The

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technology has clear potential not just for electric vehicles, but also for grid storage and smaller batteries used in microelectronics.

“We are very proud to present yet another CNT technology following our initial research in delivering the world’s darkest material, VANTA-Black via the university spin-out Surrey NanoSystems Ltd., which is showing real-world impact of fundamental research funded by UKRI.”

As demand for energy storage grows, batteries will need to store more energy, charge faster and last longer to support the UK’s transition to Net Zero. The VISiCNT design offers a promising route to meeting these challenges and could be key to powering next-generation electric vehicles and phones.

Surrey University

Related reports:

Surrey battery leads

Surrey Uni leads microbe recyling of lithium batteries

Epsom’s UCA hosts delegation from Nigeria

10 April 2026

A new Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between University for the Creative Arts (UCA), Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy and the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) from Nigeria, marking a strengthening collaboration between the UK and Nigeria’s vibrant creative and cultural industries.

The signing of the agreement was the key event in a visit of UCA’s Surrey campuses in Farnham and Epsom by a Nigerian delegation, which was part of the Nigerian President’s week-long state visit to the Royal family in the UK.

Signing the agreement was the Honourable Minister of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Creative Economy of Nigeria, Hannatu Musa Musawa; the Director General of the National Council for Arts and Culture, Obi Asika; and UCA’s Joint Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mark Ellul.

Prof. Ellul remarked: “We’re delighted to sign this agreement and strengthen our deepening relationship with Nigeria’s creative and cultural industries.

“We’re pleased to be able to join the rallying call for an institutional commitment that aligns our expertise in creative higher education with Nigeria’s ambition to build lasting relationships that positions its creative economy as a central pillar to their economic diversification and youth empowerment.”

The Honourable Minister, Hannatu Musa Musawa commented: “Nigeria is proud to formalise its partnership with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), marking a significant milestone in advancing the nation’s creative industry and creative economy.

“This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to innovation, talent development, and institutional exchange, building on sustained engagement with key stakeholders including the National Council for Arts and Culture and the Nigeria Governors Forum.

“The agreement underscores a forward-looking vision to strengthen bilateral ties between Nigeria and the United Kingdom, driving long-term growth and global competitiveness across the creative sector.”

Joining the Minister and Director General were multiple creative leaders from Nigeria and the UK including the British Council, the UK Department for Business and Trade, Bank of Industry Nigeria, Nigerian Film Corporation, DG of National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism, Nigeria, Senior Special Advisers to the Minister, VC and Pro Vice from University of Abuja.

The delegation received a tour of UCA’s industry-grade facilities in traditional and emerging arts at its School of Creative & Cultural Industries in Farnham and School of Creative Business, Fashion & Enterprise in Epsom. They also engaged in a panel discussion about UK–Nigerian Creative and Cultural Collaboration.

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Director General, Obi Asika, added: “National Council of Arts and Culture (NCAC) is delighted to have convened the Honourable Minister Hannatu Musa Musawa, the Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism and the Creative Economy of Nigeria (FMACTCE), and UCA in the UK, to advance a bold global knowledge and curriculum partnership designed to unlock the full potential of Nigeria’s creative industry and creative economy.

“Strengthened by our ongoing collaboration with the Nigerian Governors Forum (NGF) established in 2025 and aligned with the UK–Nigeria co-working group under Enhanced Trade and Investment Partnership (ETIP), where I serve as Co-Chair for Nigeria with Hon Florence Eshalomi, Mp, as Co-Chair for the UK, this milestone moment brings together influential leaders across the public and private sectors to drive innovation, talent development, and sustainable growth across the creative ecosystem.”

Many talented creatives from Nigeria are already studying at UCA, across disciplines such as film, fashion, design, animation, and digital media, and making a lasting impact across UCA’s three campuses – bringing fresh perspectives, cultural richness, and creative excellence that continue to enrich the university’s global community.

By recognising Nigeria’s ambition to promote its nation’s cultural and creative industries, UCA will utilise its expertise to further help it grow and sustain the next generation of creative talent and cultural leaders globally.

University for the Creative Arts

Photo: Nigerian delegation at The Wells, UCA in Epsom

The big child smartphone use debate starts in Surrey

10 April 2026

Parents are facing “no bigger issue” than the impact of smartphones and social media on their children, says Godalming and Ash MP Jeremy Hunt.

The former chancellor told a public meeting in Godalming that his own family are now also “in the thick of it”, debating whether to allow their kids to have smartphones and social media.

Doctors, teachers, parents and politicians gathered at Wilfred Noyce Community Centre in Godalming on March 13 to discuss concerns around children using smartphones and social media, and whether there should be a ban for under-16s.

The discussion forms part of ongoing work with the campaign group Smartphone Free Childhood Surrey, which have been working with Mr Hunt and other local campaigners to raise awareness on the impact smartphones might be having on young people’s learning and wellbeing.

Concern is growing among parents, carers and educators that smartphones are disrupting classrooms, compromising safety and chipping away at children’s mental health. Evidence shared at the meeting suggested only around 11 per cent of schools are currently smartphone-free, despite research indicating pupils in such schools can achieve GCSE results one to two grades higher.

Audience members also heard stark anecdotal evidence from a frontline healthcare professional in a statement she sent to be read at the meeting. Consultant paediatrician Dr Louise Mills described several cases she had treated linked to online trends and cyberbullying. They included a 14-year-old admitted after suffering a seizure while attempting a TikTok challenge, and an 11-year-old who suffered life-changing burns after copying something seen online. Another 14-year-old patient took their own life following sustained cyberbullying.

GP Susie Davies, founder of the charity PAPAYA (Parents Against Phone Addiction in Young Adults), said young people were experiencing a “mental health epidemic”.

She said teenagers now spend on average two to three hours a day on social media (some spend more than five) exposing them to constant comparison and harmful content.

“The tech is addictive by design,” she said. “It is structured with dopamine reward pathways which the teenage brain is particularly vulnerable to.”

Ms Davies told the community centre that problematic phone use makes young people more likely to experience

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depression. She added that children are missing out on sleep, real-world experiences and face-to-face friendships, with some even suffering trauma after viewing disturbing content online.

Shadow education secretary Laura Trott MP told the audience smartphones and social media were “not safe for our young people”. She argued schools should remove smartphones from classrooms and ensure technology is only used when it has proven educational value.

The MP for Sevenoaks, Swanley and the Dartford Villages said: “We’ve sleepwalked into the overuse of screens in schools to the detriment of education.”

Leader of Waverley Conservatives Councillor Jane Austin said: “As a mum of four, I’ve seen directly the impact smartphones and social media can have on children. A number of Surrey schools have already adopted no-smartphone policies, and the evidence is clear that this helps children focus and achieve better outcomes.

“If elected to run West and East Surrey, Conservatives will work to ensure all Surrey schools are smartphone-free so that children can learn without constant digital distraction.”

Some Year 11s in the audience raised the issue that some children might get VPNs to work round the social media ban, or might find other ways to source smartphones. “We have bans on alcohol and cigarettes for children,” she said. “They’re not 100 per cent perfect but they exist because those things are harmful. The same is true for social media.”

Campaigners from the group Smartphone Free Childhood also called for cultural change, arguing that delaying children’s first smartphone until at least 16 could dramatically improve attention spans, wellbeing and learning.

Headteacher Adam Samson said his school, Godalming Junior, already requires pupils to hand in phones at the start of the day, with Year 6 pupils sometimes allowed a simple “brick phone”. The policy has reduced cyberbullying incidents to zero, he said.

“Once children have a smartphone, they always have one,” he said. “We’re simply delaying it and giving them more time to be children.”

Emily Dalton LDRS

Surrey Space Institute could lead UK missions to the stars

10 April 2026

UK-led and UK-enabled space missions within this decade should be the hard-coded goal of the country’s space industry at every level, says the Director of the newly launched Surrey Space Institute at the University of Surrey.

Professor Adam Amara, who is also on secondment to the UK Space Agency as Chief Scientist, is calling on the sector and government partners to “stop outsourcing ambition and have belief and pride in our capabilities to operate missions on a regular basis”.

Professor Amara said:

“There is a real opportunity for ‘middle powers’, as Mark Carney put it, to partner together and compete with the established global superpowers. But this does not mean the UK space industry or the UK public should water down its ambition for what we could accomplish. It is in our gift to establish regular UK-led and operated missions.

“Mega-constellations, mega-primes, mega-states – these are the gravitational forces we feel in the world today. But the extraordinary capabilities held by the UK and our allies can be mobilised, as an antidote to the inertia of giants. The Surrey Space Institute will be a focal point for convening the technologies, the researchers and the companies that will prevent middle-power ambitions being limited by fragmentation. This must become a sectoral, a national and a collaborative commitment to contribute to the promise of space.”

The Surrey Space Institute was set up precisely to help deliver that commitment. A key focus will be to help the UK grow the skills and capabilities in today’s workforce and for future generations. The Institute will also work with its partners to conceive and operate space missions – combining hardware, software, policy and operations to tackle problems on this planet as well as in deep space. Its research will focus on three areas: managing water and climate on Earth, strengthening space systems such as satellite communications and cybersecurity, and developing the engineering, physiological, legal and economic governance solutions needed to deliver deep space exploration, operation and even settlement.

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The UK space sector has a proud heritage – and Surrey has been at the heart of it, helping to drive the small satellite revolution that proved space could be accessible, not just the preserve of superpowers. The Surrey Space Institute will take that further – forging industry partnerships, opening up space sector facilities to small businesses, and equipping the next generation with mission-ready skills through hands-on research opportunities and specialist Continuing Professional Development programmes.

Surrey University

Image: Prof Amara (Surrey Uni) against imagined background of a rocket into space from UK

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Surrey's big brains on tiny matters recognised

10 April 2026

Surrey ranked world's leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, with three physicists in global top ten

A global database of nuclear physics discoveries spanning more than a century has ranked three University of Surrey physicists among the world's top 10 for discovering and characterising nuclear isomers – rare, long-lived excited states of atomic nuclei that provide a unique window into the structure of matter and underpin modern medical imaging.

(From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan.)

Professors Zsolt Podolyák, Philip Walker and Patrick Regan – ranked second, third and tenth respectively in a global list of more than 1,000 researchers – are the highest-ranking university-based academics. Their work has helped position Surrey as the world's leading university for nuclear isomer discovery, an exceptional distinction in a field typically dominated by large national laboratories.

Nuclear isomers occur when protons and neutrons inside an atomic nucleus rearrange into higher-energy configurations that live far longer than typical excited nuclear states, which usually last much less than a microsecond. Some isomers survive for microseconds, years, or in extreme cases, far longer than the age of the universe.

Alongside helping scientists understand how elements are formed in stellar explosions and neutron-star mergers – and how they decay to create the matter around us – isomers are most widely used in medicine. The world's most common diagnostic imaging isotope, Technetium-99m, used in around 20 million diagnostic procedures each year, is itself an isomer, and the same techniques used to study these states allow for accurate cancer diagnosis and safe radiation dosing.

The rankings come from a new international database compiled by Professor Michael Thoennessen of Michigan State University and published in Nuclear Physics News International. The findings will be presented at the NUSTAR Annual Meeting in Germany from 23-27 February.

Zsolt Podolyák, Professor at Surrey's School of Mathematics and Physics, said:

"Discovering and characterising nuclear isomers is technically extremely challenging. These states are rare and often hidden within enormous amounts of background data. What this recognition shows is the sustained strength of Surrey's nuclear physics research and our ability to lead major experiments at the world's most advanced accelerator facilities."

The discoveries were carried out at major international accelerator laboratories, including the GSI Helmholtz Centre for

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Heavy Ion Research in Darmstadt, Germany, a leading hub for nuclear structure research. While the new ranking database has named GSI the world's leading laboratory for isomer discoveries, Surrey is ranked number one in isomers discovered by external users.

Patrick Regan, NPL Professor of Nuclear Metrology at the University of Surrey, said:

"Research into nuclear isomers helps us address some of the most fundamental questions in science – including where we come from and how the atoms that make up our bodies were formed in stellar explosions. To have three researchers from one university ranked in the global top 10 is highly unusual and reflects decades of sustained leadership in a very demanding field."

Professor Philip Walker, Emeritus Professor of Physics at the University of Surrey, who has previously been awarded the Institute of Physics' Rutherford Medal and the European Physical Society's Lise Meitner Prize for his contributions to nuclear structure physics, said:

"Nuclear isomers have played a central role in shaping our understanding of atomic nuclei since their discovery in 1921. They provide some of the most sensitive tests of how protons and neutrons arrange themselves inside the nucleus and have repeatedly challenged and refined our theoretical models. I am honoured to be counted among the world's leading researchers in this field."

The NUSTAR (Nuclear Structure, Astrophysics and Reactions) Annual Meeting forms part of the FAIR (Facility for Antiproton and Ion Research) accelerator facility at the GSI site in Darmstadt, bringing together around 800 nuclear physicists worldwide. Surrey Professor Zsolt Podolyák serves as spokesperson for the international NUSTAR collaboration, helping to guide its scientific direction and coordinate research at one of the world's most advanced accelerator facilities.

Photo: *From left to right: Professors Philip Walker, Zsolt Podolyák and Patrick Regan*

Surrey University

Surrey's declining birth rate means fewer school classes

10 April 2026

Surrey's falling birth rate has led to nearly 50 fewer classes of school children in less than a decade. That is according to a new strategy report aimed at protecting the future of local schools.

Cabinet members agreed to publish an updated Sustainability Strategy for Schools on February 24. The strategy sets out how Surrey County Council will work with headteachers, academy trusts and dioceses to respond to declining pupil rolls and growing financial pressure.

The figures behind the decision are sobering. Births in Surrey have dropped by 21 per cent since 2012, from 14,237 to 11,244 in 2024. Reception numbers have fallen by 11 per cent since 2016, equivalent to around 47 classes across the county.

Presenting the report, Cllr Helyn Clack, cabinet member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, said schools remain "at the heart of our communities" but are facing significant strain from lower birth rates, shifting parental preference for schools and tighter budgets.

"These pressures affect schools of every size and type," members were told. "Many leaders and governing bodies are having to make difficult decisions to sustain high-quality provision."

Schools are funded largely on a per-pupil basis, meaning fewer children directly translates into less money. While some parts of Surrey, particularly areas with new housing, are still seeing demand for places, others are experiencing sharp falls in numbers.

The county council leader, Tim Oliver, described the statistics as "quite stark", pointing out that although Surrey saw families move in during and after the pandemic, the longer-term birth rate decline mirrors the national picture.

Councillors agreed the cost-of-living poses a challenge to the county as it can be quite difficult for families to afford to move to Surrey. On the other hand, Surrey hosts a lot of private schools which are very popular so there is less overall demand for state schools.

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Cllr Sinead Mooney warned that decisions about school organisation are among the most sensitive the council makes. “This isn’t about a strategy document,” she said. “It’s about people’s local school, their children, and often the heart of their community.”

Cllr Mooney urged the council to ensure there is proper engagement with communities at an early stage as “too often there is a perception that options are being shaped before the conversation begins”. She said: “Once a school is lost, the impact is often lasting and irreversible.”

Cabinet members stressed that closures would only ever be considered as a last resort. Other options the council would explore included partnerships, shared leadership models, federations or reducing admission numbers

Particular concern was raised about small village schools, with councillors urging that decisions must not be driven “solely by financial metrics” but by a full understanding of community impact.

Cllr Clack raised concerns about a local village school in her area: “What was a thriving village school down to 13 pupils and is no longer finding it easier to maintain themselves.” She added: “We have to understand that schools are paid per pupil, and if they don’t have pupils in their schools then they don’t get the funding.”

The updated strategy commits the council to early engagement, transparent sharing of data and closer collaboration with schools and trusts. Officers will prioritise maintained schools considered most at risk and work with leaders on tailored solutions.

The council also acknowledged the wider context, including ongoing SEND pressures and looming local government reorganisation, which could reshape Surrey’s governance structure in coming years.

Despite the challenges, members emphasised their support for maintaining a broad and varied school offer across urban, suburban and rural areas. The cabinet unanimously endorsed the updated strategy and approved its publication.

Emily Dalton LDRS

Image – entirely imagined.

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association invites Cyril Frazer Award entries

10 April 2026

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association is inviting applications for this year’s **Cyril Frazer Award**, a prize established in memory of Cyril Frazer, who died in 2016. Cyril Frazer was Mayor of Epsom and Ewell when the town was first twinned with Chantilly in 1995 and was a founding member of the association. Alongside his commitment to town twinning, he was passionate about singing and was a keen member of the Epsom Male Voice Choir.

Both of these interests are reflected in the award, which offers a top prize of £500 and is open to individuals and groups within the Borough. The award will be made to qualified applicants who meet some or all of the agreed criteria, including living or studying in the Borough, meeting a special need such as mental or physical health, benefiting young people, having cultural or educational value, being related to music or the performing arts, furthering friendships or links with Chantilly, or supporting a key twinning or community event.

Last year’s winner was Sarah Carpenter of Southfield Primary School, with runners-up Siobhan Cornell and Jo Johnstone from the French and Music departments at Wallace Fields Junior School, and Olivia Gioffredo from Epsom College. The winner received a £500 grant to support French visits and learning activities planned by Southfield Park School, while the joint runners-up each received £250 to support their work in French education and musical study.

Association secretary Diana Deavin said: “Last year we were very impressed by the quality of the submissions received, which is why we awarded a total of £1,000 in the end. We are looking forward to receiving ideas and suggestions and are hopeful that this year will exceed our expectations once again. Please do consider submitting an application, as we are keen to receive entries from as wide as possible a range of potential beneficiaries and keep Cyril’s name alive in this very meaningful way.”

The prize will be awarded at the Twinning Association’s AGM in June, with a closing date for applications of **May 31, 2026**. For further information or to apply, contact **diana@epsomtwinning.com**.

Related report:

Epsom and Ewell Town-Twinning Association presents Cyril Frazer Awards for 2025

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Edinburgh Duke visits Surrey's Arts University

10 April 2026

Thursday 12th February, The Duke of Edinburgh visited University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and its School of Creative & Cultural Industries, to celebrate it providing 170 years of practice-based, creative education and to meet its current young creatives who study across traditional and emerging arts.

UCA welcomed The Duke, who has a professional background in the creative industries and is a Patron of a range of organisations that aim to widen opportunities within the sector.

His Royal Highness was met at UCA by Joint Acting Vice-Chancellors, Professor Melanie Gray and Professor Mark Ellul, alongside Chancellor, Dame Magdalene Odundo; Executive Dean, Professor Sophy Smith; and Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic Partnerships & Industry Engagement, Professor Lyndsay Duthie.

Professors Gray and Ellul, commented: "We are honoured to welcome HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, a recognised champion of the arts, to UCA in Farnham. We were delighted to give His Royal Highness a tour of our specialist facilities, where he got hands-on experience of traditional crafts to future-facing technologies, and introduce him to the next generation of creatives, our talented student community."

The Duke was also introduced to globally renowned fashion designer and UCA Chancellor Emerita, Dame Zandra Rhodes. Zandra began her own creative career at UCA, studying at one of its former art colleges in the 1960s, which she credits as the foundation for her creativity.

Other alumni to meet The Duke included actor Gabin Kongolo, who made history as the first Black person to perform and speak Welsh on stage at Shakespeare's Globe and ceramicist Tim Fluck, a British Ceramics Biennial Fresh Talent Award winner.

The Duke's tour formally commenced in UCA's creative workshops, including its glass studio, where UCA is among only a handful of specialist institutions in the UK to offer a degree in the subject. Before the tour shifted up a gear, showcasing UCA's high-tech filmmaking space, its Virtual Production studio. Students used real-time rendering software and motion capture to immerse His Royal Highness in a scene from Moryow, which was shot in the space and will make its debut on the film festival circuit later this year.

Professor Duthie then led a Creative Economy Roundtable discussion in which The Duke actively participated, alongside UCA academics and members of the University's very own Creative & Cultural Industries Leaders Network, as well as alumni.

Professor Duthie said: "The UK's creative and cultural industries contribute £126bn to the economy and support over 2.4 million jobs. Concurrently the sector is being fundamentally reshaped by emerging technologies. It was encouraging to hear His Royal Highness articulate a vision that aligns so closely with ours. At UCA, we are preparing the next generation not just to adopt new tools, but to shape how they are used — equipping students to think critically, create boldly, and lead an industry evolving faster than ever before."

The Duke's tour concluded with the unveiling of an artwork created by second year BA Graphic Design student, Ella Stevenson and received a piece of glassware designed by glass technician, Laura Quinn. The works marked The Duke's visit, celebrating 170 years of UCA.

The Duke said: "Congratulations on 170 years of developing all those essential arts, crafts and keeping the creative flame well and truly alight."

University of the Creative Arts.

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Surrey University installs Vice-Chancellor number six

10 April 2026

Guildford Cathedral played host as town and gown come together to see formal installation of Professor Stephen Jarvis as Surrey's sixth Vice-Chancellor

In a ceremony that fused a message about the dual research and teaching purpose of the University, the urgency of a rapidly changing world, and age-old academic pageantry, Professor Stephen Jarvis was formally installed as the University of Surrey's sixth President and Vice-Chancellor at Guildford Cathedral on 11 February.

The academic and civic occasion was attended by community representatives and leaders – including council leaders, current and former MPs and representatives from across the region's business and academic communities, alongside hundreds of staff and students from across the University community.

Professor Jarvis shared a message of a University with deep local roots – bringing together our community of academics, students and graduates with the wider community in Guildford, Surrey and beyond to contribute to social, economic and cultural wellbeing. He spoke of a University with a critical leadership role in combining entrepreneurship and purpose to find solutions to the challenges of the modern world, and in driving economic growth, social opportunity and the future skills agenda.

A computational scientist and former Royal Society Industry Fellow who helped establish The Alan Turing Institute, Professor Jarvis is internationally recognised for his academic leadership in high-performance computing, data science and applied artificial intelligence. On these foundations, he has established himself as an institutional and sector leader. At the University of Birmingham, where he served as Provost and Vice-Principal, he played a central role in shaping strategic vision, whilst at the University of Warwick he led industry-academic partnerships in big data as Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research).

Professor Jarvis took up the role of President and Vice-Chancellor at the University of Surrey on 15 September 2025. In his address to a packed cathedral, he said:

"The University of Surrey is defined by a dual commitment to excellence in both education and research. Ours is also a university with a clear sense of purpose: to provide an education that equips graduates for the world of work, and to undertake research that addresses some of the most urgent challenges facing society.

"Surrey aspires to be recognised among the very best universities in the UK, with a strong and growing global reputation, reach and influence. I firmly believe that the UK needs universities like ours to navigate the opportunities and challenges of technological change, respond to critical skills needs, and prepare students for the workplaces of the future.

"The University of Surrey is deeply rooted in its local community – not only a place of learning and discovery, but also an active contributor to the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of the communities we serve. The long-term success of a place is built through a shared endeavour: universities, colleges and schools that educate and inspire; public services that protect and enable; infrastructure that connects people to opportunity; and governance that provides stability, trust and direction. Aligned, we don't just function, we flourish."

The installation ceremony featured a traditional academic procession with full regalia, a specially commissioned fanfare, and music from the University Chamber Choir. The fanfare has been arranged for the installation by Dr Christopher Wiley, Head of Music and Media at the University, having been originally composed by the renowned composer of the day Dame Ethel Smyth. Dame Ethel lived in Surrey for most of her life and is commemorated at the University and with a statue in her home town of Woking. More information on the fanfare is included in the Notes to Editors, below.

Professor Jarvis joins Surrey as the University continues to deliver Vision 2041, its long-term strategy to become a globally recognised top 100 leader in research, innovation, education and civic engagement. The University has achieved its highest-ever global position of 219th in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026 and remains within the UK top 15 for student satisfaction, with 85% of graduates progressing into highly skilled employment.

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The specially commissioned fanfare was originally composed in the 1930s as one of eight Fanfares for the Musicians' Benevolent Fund, each composed by one of the eight best-known British composers of the day, based on a traditional military bugle call. The 'Men's Meal (2nd call)' bugle call, also known as 'Hot Potatoes' was composed as a fanfare by **Dame Ethel Smyth**, who lived in Surrey for most of her life and is commemorated at the University and with a statue in her home town of Woking. As well as producing an impressive canon of musical works, Dame Smyth was a much-published author and an influential suffragette. Her fanfare was first performed by the Royal Military School Bandsmen under Captain H.E. Adkins at a Musicians' Benevolent Fund Annual Dinner held in London's Savoy Hotel on 8 May 1930. It was recorded by the same ensemble and performed on other occasions, but the manuscript was lost, with Dr Wiley using the 1930s recording to bring the fanfare back to life for today's installation.

Related report:

Surrey's suffragette composer re-imagined in many ways

Surrey's suffragette composer re-imagined in many ways

10 April 2026

Rediscovering long forgotten music does not mean recovering how it was meant to be performed, and that is a major challenge for the arts, finds a new study from the University of Surrey. An expert found that rediscovered music comes with no shared understanding for how it should sound, leaving performers to make radically different interpretive choices that reshape the work itself.

In an article published in Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts, a researcher focused on a little-known piano miniature by Surrey-based British composer Ethel Smyth, written in the late nineteenth century and forgotten for 120 years. When the piece re-emerged in the 1990s and began to be performed again, no traditions of interpretation had survived. There were no clear instructions for tempo, expression or dynamics, and no recordings of historical performances to learn from.

To understand what happens when performers face this problem, the research compared all professional recordings of the same rediscovered work. Using specialist audio analysis software, each performance was measured beat by beat to track tempo and rhythmic fluctuation across the piece.

Each pianist approached the music in a fundamentally different way, particularly at its unfinished ending. Some slowed dramatically, others pushed forward and none aligned closely with one another. Even the earliest modern recording failed to establish a shared interpretive reference point.

Dr Christopher Wiley, author of the study and Head of Music and Media at the University of Surrey, said:

"When musicians open a score like this, they are standing on empty ground. While written in standard notation that is commonly understood, there is no inherited wisdom to lean on as to how the piece is supposed to be played. What I found when analysing modern recordings was not small variation in interpretation but completely different musical identities emerging from the same notes. This is creative and exciting, but also unsettling."

The research argues that this challenge will only grow, as more pieces by historically marginalised composers are rediscovered. Nor is it an issue unique to music: performers across arts disciplines such as theatre and dance will likewise increasingly encounter works stripped of their original interpretive traditions.

Rather than relying solely on manuscripts, the study proposes more imaginative solutions: performers may need to draw on unconventional sources such as letters, memoirs and personal writings to guide interpretation. In this case, Smyth's later autobiographical descriptions of the person she aimed to portray through her music offered valuable insight into its character, mood and emotional intent.

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Image: Ethel Smyth with score to her composition March of the Women in the background. Sources: English composer and suffragette Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) Library of Congress's Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID ggbain.33693, Author George Grantham Bain Collection; Restored by Adam Cuerden Score: https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/smyth-march-of-the-women. Creative Commons CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication. Montage created by Epsom and Ewell Times and is copyrighted.

Epsom and Ewell Times adds: Dame Ethel Mary Smyth DBE (22 April 1858 – 8 May 1944) was an English composer and a member of the women's suffrage movement. Her compositions include songs, works for piano, chamber music, orchestral works, choral works and operas. She lived in Surrey from childhood.

Surrey Uni on challenging AI decisions

10 April 2026

AI systems already decide how ambulances are routed, how supply chains operate and how autonomous drones plan their missions. Yet when those systems make a risky or counter-intuitive choice, humans are often expected to accept it without challenge, warns a new study from the University of Surrey.

Epsom and Ewell Times adds that the Civil Aviation Authority has granted Amazon a licence to deliver items by drone. It is uncertain when this service will actually begin.

The research, published in the Annals of Operations Research, looked at the use of optimisation algorithms in relevant areas such as transport, logistics, healthcare and autonomous systems. Optimisation algorithms are systems that decide the best possible action by weighing trade-offs under fixed rules such as time, cost or capacity. Unlike prediction models that estimate what will happen, optimisation algorithms choose what should be done.

Optimisation algorithms decide what gets prioritised, delayed or excluded under strict limits such as weight, cost, time and capacity. Yet those decisions are mathematically correct but practically opaque.

The research team's findings implies that our increasing 'blind trust' creates serious safety and accountability risks in the increasing areas of everyday life where optimisation algorithms are used.

Using a classic optimisation challenge known as the Knapsack problem, the research demonstrates how machine learning models can learn the structure of an optimisation decision and then explain it in plain language. The method shows which constraints mattered most, why certain options were selected and what trade-offs pushed others out.

The study shows how organisations can challenge optimisation algorithms before their decisions are put into practice. Rather than replacing existing systems, the approach works alongside them, using machine learning to analyse decisions and explainable AI to reveal why one option was chosen over another and which constraints and trade-offs shaped the outcome.

Dr Wolfgang Garn, author of the study and Associate Professor of Analytics at the University of Surrey, said:

"People are increasingly asked to trust optimisation systems that quietly shape major decisions. When something looks wrong, they often have no way to challenge it. Our work opens those decisions up so humans can see the logic, question it and intervene before real-world consequences occur."

This is particularly important for autonomous systems such as delivery drones. Drones must constantly decide which packages to carry while balancing battery life, payload weight and safety requirements. Without transparency, regulators and operators cannot easily justify or audit those decisions.

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Rather than replacing existing optimisation software, the approach works alongside it. Machine learning is used in this approach to analyse solutions, explain feasibility and identify brittle or high-risk decisions before deployment.

The research introduces a structured framework that ensures explanations are tailored to real decision makers. Instead of technical outputs, systems can provide human-readable reasoning, such as: “too many heavy items were selected, or battery limits were prioritised over delivery value.”

Dr Garn continued:

“Regulators are starting to ask harder questions about automated decisions. If you can’t explain why your system chose one option over another, you’ll struggle to get approval — or defend yourself when something goes wrong. This framework makes that explanation possible.”

Surrey University

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

10 April 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.”

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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

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