

# Animal health benefits human health

22 April 2024



Ensuring animals are treated well throughout their lives and using sustainable farming practices are at the heart of an ambitious partnership to control the spread of infectious diseases and improve animal welfare. The University of Surrey's School of Biosciences and School of Veterinary Medicine have joined the European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare. The University is set to receive over £2 million from the Horizon Europe Research and Innovation Programme.

Along with helping to prevent and control diseases in terrestrial and aquatic animals, the partnership will also encourage the careful use of medicines and develop methods to maintain high welfare standards. The partnership involves 90 members from 24 countries, and the initiative's total funding is €360 million.

Professor Roberto La Ragione, the Surrey Principal Investigator and Head of the School of Biosciences at the University of Surrey, said:

"With the rising numbers of diseases in animals that are spreading to humans, the scientific community is waking up to the fact that animal health and welfare are inextricably linked to our own.

"I'm proud that our University is joining colleagues from across the country and Europe, so that we can not only share and tackle these issues at a large scale, but also find sustainable solutions that improve the wellbeing of the animals that we share this planet with."

The European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare aims to support a food system that is fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly. Its goals align with the European Green Deal and the related Farm to Fork strategy, which focuses on sustainable food production.

Professor Kamalan Jeevaratnam, Head of the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Surrey, said:

"Our University has a long-standing commitment to the One Health, One Medicine ethos, and we are excited to share our expertise and learn from our partners. This collaboration underscores the UK's significant role in advancing the wellbeing of humans, animals, and our natural environment for a better future."

Nathalie Vanderheijden of the University of Ghent, coordinator of the EUP AH&W, sums up the partnership as follows:

"Our partnership is a new, open initiative, bringing together EC funding, national/regional funders and research-performing organisations to concentrate efforts on developments with high societal, economic and policy impact. Belgium, with its current presidency of the European Council for six months, appreciates the potential of unity in driving change!"

Speaking of the Partnership EFSA's, Chief Scientist Carlos Das Neves said:

"We are pleased to announce that EFSA will be a full partner of the European Partnership Animal Health & Welfare. This is the first time that we will be a beneficiary in a research partnership under Horizon Europe, which will enable a smoother transition from research to regulatory science. We are prepared and committed to bring our expertise to the table, together with the best experts in Europe, for the benefit of animal health and welfare."

The European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare started on the 1st of January 2024 and held its kick-off meeting on the 26th and 27th of February 2024 in Brussels. All partners signed the Grant Agreement on the 29th of March 2024.

Image: Marie Anna Lee

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# Epsom's Earth health doctor checks GMC

22 April 2024



**Epsom** residents led by Dr. **Kristine Damberg** converged Thursday 18th April on the General Medical Council (GMC) headquarters in Central London, decrying what they perceive as the regulator's lackluster response to the urgent health risks posed by climate change. The demonstration, organized by the **Planetary Health Coalition**, aimed to spotlight the pressing need for action on climate-related health issues affecting the community.



Dr Damberg protesting outside General Medical Council.

Dr. **Kristine Damberg**, Senior Simulation Practitioner and ESTH Sustainability Champion based at **Epsom Hospital**, voiced concerns about the immediate health impacts of climate change in the area. She lamented the rise in climate-related ailments among patients, including heat-related illnesses during the 2022 heatwave. Dr. Damberg emphasized the gravity of the situation, citing staggering statistics: "In the UK, 29-43,000 people die unnecessarily every year because of air pollution."

Adding: "Even in a relatively affluent area like Epsom we are seeing these impacts on patients presenting to GP surgeries and hospitals. In the 2022 heatwave there were 3000 excess deaths in the UK and on the wards at Epsom Hospital the temperature was consistently above 30 degrees. It was extremely challenging for staff to work and keep already vulnerable patients safe at these extreme temperatures."

She stressed the imperative for proactive measures, echoing The Lancet's designation of climate change as the most significant global health threat of the 21st century. "We need to act now to protect our community."

However, the GMC's recent efforts to incorporate sustainability into medical ethics guidelines have fallen short, according to Dr. **Ramina Yassaie**, a medic and ethicist. She criticized the optional nature of these additions, stating, "Practising climate-conscious medicine should be a clear duty of a doctor." She called for more robust guidance from the regulator to address the climate crisis head-on.

Epsom resident **Warren Bunce** echoed these sentiments, expressing disappointment in the GMC's perceived inaction. "The General Medical Council's silence on climate change is a betrayal of public health," he asserted. He called for stronger support for healthcare professionals in Epsom and beyond to confront the health consequences of a warming planet.

Protestors also raised concerns about the GMC's financial ties to fossil fuel industries. Dr. Christelle Blunden, a GP from Southampton, highlighted the disconnect between the GMC's ethical standards and its investments. "Doctors want their money out of ecologically destructive industries," Dr. Blunden stated. She emphasized the need for regulatory bodies to lead by example in addressing the climate crisis.

The protest occurred amidst growing legal restrictions on climate activism, with the recent conviction of Dr. Sarah Benn, a GP from Birmingham, serving as a stark reminder of the risks faced by healthcare workers advocating for environmental causes. Dr. Benn's case underscored broader concerns about the erosion of protest rights in the UK, prompting calls for greater protection for activists.

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## Job insecurity upsetting collegiate life

22 April 2024



Nearly 92 per cent of voters in a Surrey University College Union (UCU) indicative survey supported holding a vote of no confidence in the Vice Chancellor, with a further 96 per in favour of a vote for the executive board.

Surrey UCU has been campaigning against ‘compulsory’ redundancies and financial severance elicited by the University of Surrey in an all-staff emergency meeting on March 6. Vice Chancellor Professor Max Lu (VC) announced the university would have to cut staff and assets as part of cost-saving exercises.

A UCU open letter dated April 11 alleged the university was trying to turn a “£10m deficit” into a “£10m surplus”. A spokesperson claimed staff feel they have been “coerced” into redundancy, or “feeling that their hand has been forced”.

An academic, who wished to remain anonymous, said: “It’s extremely distracting and upsetting [...] Commitment to the university falls and commitment to your work falls. You invest a lot of time into your institution and when your institution doesn’t value you back, you question why.”

Speaking about her department, she said: “It’s horrible. Morale is very low” and people feel “very insecure about their jobs”.

High inflation, soaring energy bills and overall cost of living pressures were cited by the VC as reasons why the university needed to reduce its expenditure. Sector-wide problems within Higher Education such as “devaluing domestic tuition fees” and declining numbers of international students “due to external factors” were also highlighted in a letter by the VC

However, the UCU argued that poor financial management in “historical borrowing and significant spending on multi-million-pound projects” undermined the VC’s claim. Recent developments include the Surrey Institute for People-Centred AI (opened in 2021) and launching a new medical school with an intake for 2024.

Over 90 per cent of the university’s income was borrowed externally, coming second in the UK in 2021/22. Gross debt increased by £16.6m in 2022/23 to £296.5m compared to 2021/22, as the University entered into a new £20m term loan used to support the purchase of a building on campus, this was partially offset as a result of scheduled repayments.

Soaring from 0.1 per cent interest rates in December 2021, to 5.25 in 2023, the university now has to pay back around 4.5 per cent interest in its loans (2024).

“It’s a reckless [...] way of living,” the academic said, “to borrow, borrow, borrow with the hope that you will make that money back.”

Rather than trying to “play with the big boys” and be a Russell Group university or UCL, the academic said, “Surrey needs to play to its strengths” as a small, safe university in Guildford which looks after its students.

Fewer Surrey UCU members voted to start formal industrial action (75.3%) than those in favour of a no confidence motion. Academic staff explained striking would mean taking teaching away from university students, who were not at fault.

The union is meeting on April 22 to discuss the next steps and has invited MP Angela Ricardson and parliamentary candidates to attend.

A spokesperson from the University of Surrey said: “Our University is not immune to the unprecedented financial pressures facing the UK’s higher education sector - including high inflation, high energy costs, the sustained devaluation of tuition fees and the recent decline in international student numbers. We’re taking a focused and nuanced approach to tackling these sector-wide challenges at Surrey, with our approach designed to minimise the impact on our people and our core mission. We are looking at a variety of measures to increase income and save on costs including offering voluntary severance to some colleagues. We are hoping to avoid compulsory redundancies.”

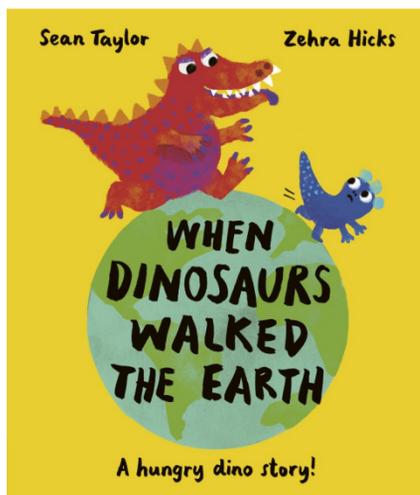
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## Walking with dinosaurs ... not quite

22 April 2024



Epsom-based **Zehra Hicks** is an award-winning children's book author and illustrator whose books have been translated in over 20 languages. Through her work, she shows the magic of storytelling to children through her comical illustrations, which has led to an already impressive list of accolades, including being highly commended for the Macmillan Prize for Illustration and winner of the Heart of Hawick Award, to name a few.



**When Dinosaurs Walked The Earth**, authored by Sean Taylor and illustrated by Zehra, is one of five shortlisted books for this year's £10,000 **Oscar's Book Prize**. Founded in honour of book-loving Oscar Ashton who passed away aged three and a half from an undetected heart condition, the prize seeks to find the best children's picturebook, and is supported by **Amazon** and the **Evening Standard** with Princess Beatrice as a patron. The winner will be announced at a ceremony in central London on the 7th May.

Zehra is a tutor at Chelsea College of Arts, where she completed a short course in Book Illustration in 2009.

Since then, she has been highly commended for the Macmillan Prize for Illustration, winner of the Heart of Hawick Award, named Lovereading4Kids Debut of the Year in 2011 and shortlisted for the Read It Again! Cambridgeshire Children's Picture Book Award.

About Epsom Zehra told the Epsom and Ewell Times: "I moved to Epsom from London 14 years ago when I was pregnant with our second child. For quite a while I missed living London, but now I definitely have the best of both worlds. I feel incredibly lucky to be living in a town with so many open green spaces like Epsom Common and Epsom Downs, yet only being a 35 mins train ride away from the capital.

"I love going for daily walks with my sausage dog, Vincent. Sometimes I even run with him. I'm much more likely to come up with book ideas on a walk or run than stuck behind my desk! And I love bumping into people for little chats. Being an author and an illustrator can be quite lonely, and I find Epsom residents and dog walkers so friendly.

"I work in cafes too, so although some people may think there are too many cafes in Epsom, I happily make use of them ALL! You may often see me in Gail's or D's Coffee House with a sketch book working on new ideas. I love the buzz in cafes - it helps my creativity, and I love that there seems to be more and more residents working in cafes, creating a lively working community."

"Having an art shop and bookshop is a huge benefit to me too, as is the market. It would be lovely to have some more independents though. A few are cropping up, but very, very slowly!"

Image: Zehra Hicks and her sausage dog on Epsom Common

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## Something special going on at Epsom baths

22 April 2024



**Rainbow Leisure Centre in Epsom** has recently started running tailored swimming lessons for children with special needs and disabilities.

The sessions - which have proved to be a big hit - take place in small groups in the teaching pool where it is quieter and less stressful for the children. Mums and dads join their young person in the water along with the class teacher, picking up tips on how to help their child feel more confident.

Participants are aged from 4 - 8 years old and have a range of neurological and physical difficulties such as autism, dyspraxia and impaired vision. Children are also welcome to take part in the mainstream classes during the rest of the week if they feel confident enough to do so.

Young swimmer Heidi, seen here with mum Stacey and teacher Ana, loves her classes at Rainbow. Stacey says, "She loves the water and gets to have fun while learning to be safe."

**Mary Mannion**, Swimming School Manager at the centre, comments, "The classes are very popular. We're delighted to be able to offer this service to young people and their families. Keeping fit and safe in the water is so important for children of all ages and abilities."

Rainbow is run by GLL under the 'Better' brand. As a charitable social enterprise, the organisation is committed to supporting the wellbeing of local communities.

SEND swimming takes place on Thursdays at 6.15pm. For more details, look at the app at Better\_uk or contact customer services at customer.service@gll.org or call 0330 123 1500.

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## Boxing champions young people in Epsom & Ewell

22 April 2024



A new local boxing programme, led by **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council** and delivered by **Epsom Boxing Academy**, saw its first cohort graduate in March. 14 students, referred by local schools, were enrolled on the course. Graduating students were awarded an England Boxing Bronze Award which was complimented with an AQA Empire Fighting Chance Award in nutrition and health.

The structured boxing programme aimed to help young people build confidence, self-discipline, and resilience as well as improving self-esteem and supporting positive mental health.

Councillor **Clive Woodbridge**, (RA Ewell Village) Chair of the Community and Wellbeing Committee, said; "I was honoured to attend the graduation of the Epsom & Ewell Community Boxing Scheme.

"Boxing is a fantastic way to keep fit, but it has also been shown to aid in the development of life skills including self-discipline, mental strength and control, and personal responsibility; as well as helping manage feelings of aggression. Boxing also provides invaluable opportunities for students to connect with positive mentors.

"We know that community schemes like this one are a fantastic way to tackle inclusion in sport whilst promoting positive outcomes for young people in our borough. I look forward to Epsom & Ewell Borough Council spearheading more initiatives like this one in the future."

**Joe Harding**, Boxing Coach and founder of Epsom Boxing Academy, added; "The scheme was a great chance to create and deliver a programme specifically for our community in Epsom & Ewell.

We saw an unbelievable change in the students over the weeks as they developed and demonstrated boxing techniques, learnt about the human body, and about food labels and nutrition.

Life coaching and mentoring helped students' progress in terms of their self-confidence, personal discipline, and

punctuality. We were able to provide a safe space and an environment for the young people to express themselves. The results were outstanding. We were extremely proud to be part of such a great project.”

The Community Boxing Scheme is part of Epsom & Ewell Borough Council’s wider strategy to improve the wellbeing of residents through activity; and reduce barriers to sports and leisure participation for those who may not otherwise have access to facilities. It follows on from a successful swimming programme, delivered in partnership with leisure operator and social enterprise GLL and made possible by an award from Sport England funded by the National Lottery.

Image courtesy EEBC

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## 1st generation UCA graduates celebrated

22 April 2024



Two graduates from the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) in Epsom, Surrey have been named in Universities UK’s 100 Faces campaign, celebrating the stories and achievements of first-generation students.

**McKenna Marsden** and **Troy Hunter** feature in the campaign’s arts and sports talents category alongside Happy Valley star, Amit Shah, the crime writer Sir Ian James Rankin OBE, and BBC Sports Personality of the Year 2022, Beth Mead. All 100 graduates listed by Universities UK were the first in their families to attend university.

“Going to university gave me a lot more independence and taught me new skills, developing my abilities in a subject which was once just a passion,” said McKenna, who is a BA (Hons) Fashion graduate. He was chosen by British Vogue as one of its top 50 emerging designers, showcased his graduate collection at London Fashion Week, and interned at Christopher Kane.

He said: “University gave me stability while allowing me to break into the fashion industry, leading to many big achievements. I don’t think I would have had the success I did without studying at university.”

Originally from Newcastle, McKenna’s working-class background was the main inspiration for his final graduate fashion collection and continues to influence his designs.

“Anything is possible if you believe it and work hard for it no matter how many setbacks you may have, if you believe you can achieve your goals you can,” McKenna added.

Troy, who graduated from UCA in 2013 with a degree in BA (Hons) Film Production, has gone on to write episodes for the hit Netflix show Sex Education and an episode of Eastenders. He was also nominated for Outstanding Breakthrough Creative (Television) at the NAACP Awards.

Troy said: “Studying film production at UCA made a huge difference in my life, it gave me the confidence and determination to continue pursuing a career in the TV and Film industry when people around me were telling me otherwise.”

His success continues in the form of a short film called Mya and his debut play Black Pride, as well as a television adaptation of the same name, with Maia Pictures.

New research commissioned by Universities UK revealed the transformative impact of going to university, with almost three-quarters of first-in-the-family students agreeing their degree gave them the confidence to apply for jobs without feeling like an imposter.

**Vivienne Stern** MBE, Chief Executive of Universities UK, said: “There are those who say that too many people go to university. I disagree. These stories tell you why. In this country, you are still twice as likely to go to university if you are from the wealthiest background, compared to the least wealthy. That’s not right.

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## Surgery delay after hip break led to death

22 April 2024



An elderly woman who tragically died after waiting five days for hip surgery prompted a coroner to raise concerns that a hospital is putting patients at risk of an early death.

Anne Rowland, a care home resident in Oxted, died in East Surrey Hospital after inflammation and infection of the lungs following surgery.

Ms Rowland broke her hip following a collision and fall with another care home resident who was partially sighted on February 27, 2023. She was taken to East Surrey Hospital the same day.

Coroner Anna Crawford found there was “no clinical reason” for the surgery not taking place until five days later on March 3 as the patient was “clinically fit”.

She concluded that outstanding infrastructure repairs and the use of different guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) that the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust was “placing patients at risk of early death”.

NICE guidelines say that hip surgery should take place on the day of the injury or the day after. Early mobilisation is recommended for hip fracture patients to reduce the risk of complications, including pneumonia.

East Surrey Hospital uses a metric of 48 hours within which to conduct such surgery and does not use the NICE timeframe. Although the hospital has a dedicated operating theatre for trauma patients, on some occasions demand outweighs capacity.

However, the surgery did not take place because “other trauma patients were prioritised ahead of [Mrs Rowland] based upon their relative clinical need”.

Operating theatre capacity at the hospital has on occasion been compromised by infrastructure failings. An entire new surgery unit is being constructed and is anticipated to be completed by 2025 at the latest. The orthopaedic theatres also need new air handling and chillers which is yet to be completed.

The coroner concluded that waiting for her operation “caused” Mrs Rowland to develop dementia and immobility. This “contributed” to her developing aspiration pneumonia following surgery. Mrs Rowland’s condition deteriorated resulting in her death at East Surrey Hospital on March 31, 2023.

Ed Cetti, chief medical officer of Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust, said: “We are profoundly sorry for the delay in Mrs Rowland’s hip surgery and offer our deepest sympathies to her family during this difficult time.”

The Trust said that in the months since Mrs Rowland’s death, it has “significantly” reduced delays in hip fracture surgery. In November 2023 59 per cent of operations occurred within 36 hours and 91 per cent within 48 hours.

Mr Cetti added: “We always strive to perform surgeries of this nature as soon as possible and monitor our performance against the 36-hour time window identified by NICE guidance. We also monitor against a 48-hour window to ensure any patients that miss the 36-hour target are not waiting longer than 48 hours.

“Recognising that not all patients are medically well enough for surgery within 36 hours, we are working on improving our performance further and reaching the 80 per cent target by the end of 2024/25.”

Image: Entrance to East Surrey Hospital. Credit Get Surrey\*

## **New SEND school blocked by Nimby?**

22 April 2024



A group of Surrey parents say they are “devastated” and fear it is back to the drawing board after plans for a ‘much needed’ special needs school will likely be quashed.

Planning permission was approved by Mole Valley District Council (MVDC) in March 2023 for a state-run Betchwood Vale

school on the site of the vacant Chalcraft Nursery and garden centre. Around 82% of kids with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) have to commute out of the district to go to a specialist school. One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children

But a single claimant took it to the High Court to challenge the procedure on the way the decision was made on two grounds: application of the environmental habitat regulations and traffic flow. The court has said the first point is valid and thrown out the second.

Using his delegated authority, the council's Deputy Chief Executive decided not to defend the legal challenge, asking the court to quash the decision, given the legal costs.

Originally scheduled to open in September 2023, parents say they were thrilled to think there might 'finally be a school locally' to cater for their needs.

Elizabeth Marett, mum and campaigner for the school, told the Local Democracy Reporting Service that she feels education for disabled children is not being prioritised. She said: "I am disappointed, angry and upset with the local residents who have taken it upon themselves to oppose the schools because they are essentially saying the education of disabled children is unimportant."

"There are children who need schools, and if this isn't built, their future is very bleak. Is there any way we can convince these people that what they're doing is really damaging for the local children of the future? These schools are hard to come by. There are so many children in the county that need to go to this school." Other parents called it a "bitter blow" to the SEND community.

Elizabeth said some children in her son's class "have nowhere else to go" as mainstream school is not possible for children with anxiety and complex needs.

Betchwood Vale school is likely to be for high-functioning autistic children, who do not have other learning disabilities, if it goes ahead. It would teach children between seven and 19 years old, providing places for around 60 pupil in its first year and going up to 180 children over a few years.

Currently, more than 100 autistic children who live in Mole Valley and require a specialist place go to school out of their district, meaning they spend a long time every day travelling large distances between home and school.

One mum said she covers 80 miles a day on the school run to access education for two of her children whilst another is transported 22 miles in the opposite direction.

Fighting against the application in the planning meeting (March 2023) was an unofficial group called Ladyegate Road Residents Association Ltd (LRRA). The group, named after a private road near the site, objected to the application because of the adverse impact on traffic flow and approach to Dorking, the negative effect on biodiversity and that no alternative options have been investigated for the site.

Planning documents reveal Surrey County Council (SCC) Highways warned of "minor" impacts to traffic on the A25 junctions as a result of the proposed school. It also added conditions of improving vehicle access on nearby Punchbowl Lane.

Cllr Joanna Slater (Conservative for Leatherhead South) said: "What is also troubling is that this has happened completely behind the scenes. Councillors did not know."

The council's Development Management Committee (DMC) meeting on 3 April heard that the team claim they were not informed of the SEND school decision being changed or is likely to change. A spokesperson for MVDC said it is not "unusual practice" for a decision to be taken by a senior officer under delegated authority. They said all local ward members were kept updated in the proceedings.

Cllr Slater added: "At best this is a delay to the SEND school opening. At worst, it will result in the whole project failing as the budget for planning permission has been spent."

Clare Curran, Lead Cabinet Member for Children and Families at SCC, said: "We are disappointed with Mole Valley's decision not to defend the judicial review. The proposed Betchwood Vale Academy is critical to achieving Surrey's ambition that autistic children are educated closer to home."

SCC have promised to deliver 2,440 permanent additional specialist school places in Surrey between 2019 - 2026 to create capacity for 5,760 planned places by 2030/31.

SCC said it has been advised by the Department of Education of their ongoing commitment to deliver Betchwood Vale Academy in full once a positive planning application has been confirmed.

A Mole Valley spokesperson said: "We are working as quickly as possible to get a decision from the Court. Once that is made, we will reconsult on the planning application and soon after - return the application to the Development Management Committee to make the planning decision."

It added: "This will allow us to ensure that there is no future potential for legal challenge and that once a new decision is made, if it is to again approve the application, then the delivery of the school can start swiftly."

The Department of Education has been contacted for comment.

The Ladyegate Road Residents Association is not an official body. The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) tried to contact the group for additional comment but was unable to do so.

Related report:

Surrey to SEND £40m for special schools

Image: Betchwood Vale SEND school plan. From Design and Access statement. Credit: Jestico + Whiles Associates Ltd.

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## New born enters world by rare EXIT

22 April 2024



A 50 strong team of specialist medics crammed into an operation theatre recently to carry out a globally rare procedure on a newborn baby and save his life.

Little Freddie Verschueren was delivered at St George's hospital in South West London using the Ex-utero Intrapartum Treatment (EXIT) procedure which delivers babies who could potentially have serious challenges at birth.

This procedure is used when an unborn child has an obstruction in their airway which means they would be unable to breathe independently once they are removed from the placenta.

Professor Asma Khalil, consultant obstetrician at St George's, led the entire operation, which involved about 50 medics and other staff in the operating theatre.

She said: "An EXIT procedure involves a large number of healthcare professionals from various backgrounds including an obstetrician, fetal medicine specialist, an anaesthetist, a paediatric anaesthetist, a paediatric ENT surgeon, midwives and the neonatal team, as well as other theatre staff."

In little Freddie's case there was a cyst on his tongue that could potentially block his airways it was detected in a scan during his mum's second trimester. The team made an incision in mum Anna's tummy and delivered Freddie's head and shoulders first, leaving him attached to the placenta and able to breathe.

They established an airway so he could breathe independently before delivering the rest of him. Freddie weighed 6lbs 8oz (3.1kg) at birth and was able to go home with his parents Anna and Peter Verschueren a healthy baby.

Anna said: "We've been incredibly impressed with the service we have had at St George's, at every step it has been outstanding care. When we found out we needed to have the procedure we felt in such safe hands with the experts at St George's. We never doubted their skill and advice."

Professor Khalil added: "I am very grateful to the efforts by every member of our large team who ensured that we delivered the best care to Anna and Freddie. Saving babies' lives and caring for the parents during challenging times is the most rewarding aspect of my job."

An EXIT procedure is extremely rare. However, despite its global rarity this is the second time it has been carried out in St George's this year.

Dr Richard Jennings, Group Chief Medical Officer for St George's, Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals and Health Group, said: "St George's is one of the few hospitals in the country that carries out this rare procedure and saves the lives of many babies. I am pleased to hear that Freddie is doing well thanks to our dedicated and skilled teams and everyone at St George's wishes him and his family all the best for the future."

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## £1.1 m boost for Surrey Uni's solar thermal research

22 April 2024



Solar-thermal devices that have the potential to transform how we heat our homes and generate power on a larger scale are being developed by a team led by the University of Surrey. This exciting project has received a £1.1 million grant from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

The main goal of this research is to create new designs for surfaces that can selectively absorb sunlight while also efficiently emitting heat in the form of near-infrared radiation. These devices are different from solar cells, which typically convert sunlight into electricity; solar-thermal devices use sunlight to generate heat, which can then be used for driving mechanical engines or converted into electricity.

The research project is led by Surrey, in collaboration with the University of Bristol and Northumbria University and combines their expertise in photonics, advanced materials, applied electromagnetics, and world-class nanofabrication facilities.

Professor Marian Florescu, Principal Investigator from the University of Surrey, said:

“Our project is not just about innovating; it’s about responding to a global necessity. The sun showers us with a tremendous amount of energy every day, far more than we currently capture. By developing these advanced solar-absorbing surfaces, we are opening up new, efficient ways to harness this abundant solar energy. Our goal is to transform how we use sunlight, making it a powerhouse for clean and sustainable energy that meets our growing needs without harming the planet.”

The project has several aims:

- To develop solar absorbers that can work well even at very high temperatures.
- Improve the efficiency of the team’s special solar-absorbing structures. The team plans to build prototype models to demonstrate how well they work.
- To better understand and ultimately improve how these devices handle and perform with the heat they generate from sunlight.

Professor Marin Cryan, Co-Principal Investigator from the University of Bristol, said:

“The University of Bristol has been developing thermionic solar cell technology for a number of years. These use concentrated sunlight to heat materials to the point where thermionic emission of electrons occurs, which can form the basis of high-efficiency, low-cost solar cells. This exciting project will develop very efficient solar selective absorbers, which will be an important component of the overall cell design.”

Dr Daniel Ho, Co-Principal Investigator from Northumbria University, said:

“Northumbria University is at the forefront of thermophotovoltaic research, utilising a specialised microscope heating stage alongside an in-house built Fourier imaging spectroscopy system. This advanced thermal analysis technique enables comprehensive and angle-resolved scattering analysis across both visible and infrared spectrums, even under vacuum conditions and at temperatures as high as 1000°C.

“We are excited to work with our partners to help achieve pioneering developments in renewable energy research.”

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## Virtual care to rise under ambulance plan

22 April 2024



Over a third of South East Coast Ambulance (SECAmb) service responses will be done remotely in a new five-year

strategy. (Here “remotely” means by video call or telephone rather than sending out an ambulance.)

The NHS Trust said its care model is no longer “fit for purpose” as it prepares for a 15 per cent increase in patient demand over the next five years, at a board meeting last week (April 4). Increasing demands on the service included health care becoming more complex, the ageing population and changing areas of deprivation.

By 2029, the Trust aims that over a third of all its patients will be signposted to another service- leaving 65 per cent of patients with an ambulance response. The change will affect Surrey, Thames Valley, Kent and Medway as well as Sussex Integrated Care Systems (ICS).

Simon Weldon, CEO, reassured that SECAmb would still be there to protect and look after the sick who needed an ambulance. He added: “If patients don’t need an ambulance, we can help you get you to a place which can meet your healthcare needs.”

Urgent medical needs such as cardiac arrest, a stroke, heart attack, pneumonia, childbirth and newborn care would still be attended to by ambulances, the Trust said.

Delivering this strategy, over the next three years, SECAmb expects it to meet emergency care needs within the national standards of 7 minutes for calls for immediate life-threatening and time-critical injuries and illnesses; and 18 minutes for emergency calls.

For non-emergency patients, virtual care will be provided via an assessment by a remote senior clinician. Meeting documents said this would enable patients to be “cared for directly or referred to the most appropriate care provider”.

Investing in a data and digital strategy was highlighted as a key part of the new direction. The board heard how new technology like AI would help the SECAmb make better decisions and lead virtual consultations. These could be used to respond to patient needs in a remote and professional setting rather than sending an ambulance.

Meeting documents revealed that 88 per cent of patients received an ambulance response; but an SECAmb officer said the outcomes from the cases indicated only 30.5 per cent of patients needed clinical care.

Only 12 per cent of patients are currently referred or signposted to another service rather than receiving ambulance care; but under the new strategy for 2029, this will increase to 35 per cent.

Team Member for SEAmb, Matt Dechaine, said: “Sending a fully kitted ambulance is a very expensive way for the public purse to respond to patient needs, when other services may be able to address it in a cost-effective way.”

Covering five years, the new strategy will be carried out in three phases: designing new models of care, collaborating with partners and developing a digital strategy; implementing the change and finalising and improving the operational model. Digitalisation of the service will begin in phase 2, with electronic health records deployed by March 2025.

SEAmb identified its model as “unsustainable when challenged” from an operational, workforce and financial perspective. The Trust found it would need to employ 600 more people over the next five years to respond to demand.

Not all non-emergency patient consultations will be resolved solely over the telephone. Simon told the board that the strategy aims to “align patient needs with ambulance services”.

Over 2,000 staff, 400 volunteers and 350 members of the public have been consulted on the strategy, with the Trust saying it has been “clinically led”. System partners have also been invited to 20 sessions to share their views.

The full new SECAmb strategy is set to be published in May 2024.

Call staff at South East Coast Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust. Credit SECAmb

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## Psychiatric bed shortages in Surrey

22 April 2024



A man tragically took his own life in Surrey after a mental health relapse, prompting a coroner to warn of a shortage of psychiatric beds in Surrey hospitals.

Jonathan Harris, 52, who suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, died by suicide on June 27, 2022.

If an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed had been available just days earlier, Jonathan would not have died, the coroner ruled. Coroner Anna Crawford judged that action should be taken to prevent future deaths.

Bed shortages for mental health patients in Surrey, as well as nationwide, has been an ongoing issue for NHS Trusts. Many patients are forced to move up to 60 miles away from home to receive treatment because there are few beds in their area. The court heard that this is in the context of a national shortage of suitably qualified psychiatrists.

Following a lengthy psychiatric inpatient stay in Camberley in November 2021, Jonathan was under the care of Surrey Heath Community Mental Health Recovery Service, which is part of Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust.

Jonathan was prescribed anti-psychotic medication. In February and May 2022, Jonathan requested for his medication to be reduced to fortnightly and then once every three weeks.

The reduction in medication in May 2022 was judged as “premature” by the coroner. Jonathan had reportedly shown signs of appearing “suspicious” when he was seen by the Surrey Heath Mental Health Team (MHT) on May 4. However, these signs were not explored.

The mental health team were also aware Mr Harris was moving house, meaning and move to a new community mental health team, which may affect his wellbeing.

Jonathan’s mental health continued to deteriorate and on June 24 it the MHT decided that he required an assessment under the Mental Health Act.

No inpatient bed was available and therefore the assessment did not take place. If Jonathan had been assessed, he would have been detained under the Mental Health Act and admitted to hospital.

The coroner said: “Mr Harris would not have taken his own life had he remained well and the relapse of his paranoid schizophrenia materially contributed to his death.

“Mr Harris would not have died had an inpatient psychiatric hospital bed been available on either 24, 25 or 26 June 2022.

“The court also heard that there is an ongoing shortage of available inpatient psychiatric beds in Surrey and that this is in the context of a national shortage of inpatient psychiatric beds. The court is concerned that both of these matters present a risk of future deaths.”

The Prevention of Future Deaths report was issued to NHS England rather than to Surrey and Borders Partnership. NHS England was invited to comment; it said it is working to the coroner’s deadline of 56 days to respond with the action it will take or proposed to take, and such information is not yet available.

Related reports:

[Coroner catalogues care failures in diabetic death](#)

[Better private - public health communications could prevent deaths](#)

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## Cancer patient getting the right royal treatment

22 April 2024



The first cancer patient set to undergo a revolutionary new procedure that could cut treatment time to almost a quarter said it was a “privilege” to be given the opportunity.

The **Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust** is taking part in a new clinical trial led by the **Royal Marsden** into prostate cancer. Currently, patients are treated with radiotherapy over a minimum of 20 treatments which lasts four weeks or more. Under this new process, that time could be reduced to one and a half weeks.

Michael Robson, 78, is the first patient to be part of the trial in Royal Surrey. He was diagnosed in December 2023. He said: “One of my friends was diagnosed with prostate cancer and he said I should get a test so I had a blood test and I was called by my GP and sent for an appointment at urology. I was fortunate enough to meet Dr Philip Turner who gave me the options and went through everything. Everything has been explained to me in a way that is easy to understand and made the journey so much easier to deal with. All of the staff I couldn’t complement them highly enough. They have been fantastic.”

Michael was given options for treatment and was asked if he was interested in taking part in the clinical trial and he agreed straight away. He added: “It’s been fantastic here. I feel very privileged to be the first patient. The service has been first class from everybody concerned.”

Patients with low and intermediate risk disease who took part in a trial called PACE-B demonstrated that the process would work in the tighter time frames. This new study is to determine whether those considered high-risk would get the same benefits. The trial, called PACE-NODES, was opened at The Royal Marsden and was designed jointly by investigators from Queen’s University Belfast and The Institute of Cancer Research, London.

Dr Philip Turner, consultant clinical oncologist and principal investigator for the trial, said: “We are delighted to be opening the PACE NODES trial in Royal Surrey. This is part of our drive to give Surrey patients access to the very best

oncology clinical trials from across the UK and indeed from across the world.

“The benefits with regard to timing are enormous – the standard of care for these men is a minimum of four weeks of daily visits which is very disruptive to life. The rates of side effects are low. Crucially, the five fraction treatment appears just as safe as conventional 20 fraction treatments which we have been using for years very safely.”

Chief executive Louise Stead said: “Royal Surrey has a long and proud tradition of being a premier centre of UK oncology research and we are determined, with the support of our patients and other partners, to ensure as many patients as possible have access to ground-breaking research close to home. If successful, this could make a huge difference to patients receiving treatment for prostate cancer.”

L-R: Radiographer Kate Maltby, Michael Robson, Dr Philip Turner

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## Epsom squash team stand the squeeze

22 April 2024



When five girls from **Rosebery School, Epsom** formed the school’s first ever squash team just six months ago with a view to entering the England Squash National Schools Championships 2023/24, little did they know how far they would go in this tough and prestigious tournament. Being a state school with no on-site squash facilities, they knew they would be competing against a lot of private schools around the country, many with their own squash courts and dedicated coaches. They were, however, all keen squash players and junior members of **Ebbisham Sports Club** in Epsom where they trained on a regular basis.

By dint of their considerable success in Stages 1 and 2 of the Championships, held respectively at Limpsfield Club in November 2023 and **Epsom College** in January 2024, the Rosebery School Girls Squash Team were delighted to learn that they had done enough to qualify for the Finals held in Birmingham on 14<sup>th</sup> March. One of the top eight teams from around the country to reach the Finals, the Rosebery Squash Team battled hard through three very tough matches during the course of a long day, with some excellent individual match wins and some very close losses. Whilst they came extremely close to beating one of the other schools, in the end the Rosebery team had to settle for final place, but did so with a smile on their faces and knowing they had given the Championships their all.

Gillian Mead

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## NESCOT marks 70 years with a tree

22 April 2024



Nescot (North East Surrey College of Technology) in Ewell marked seven decades since its official opening with a commemorative tree planting in the college grounds today (22.03.24). The Mayor Epsom & Ewell, Councillor **Rob Geleit** (Labour Court Ward) planted a silver birch along with **Julie Kapsalis**, Principal and CEO of Nescot and **Chris Muller**, Chair of Nescot Corporation. They were joined by three students, Donna from our Supported Internship programme; Kirsty from Access to Nursing and Anna from Catering who have all had a successful term and made an impression.

Speaking at the tree planting, Julie Kapsalis, said: “It is wonderful to have students take part in this historic moment as without them and the many thousands who walked through these gates before them, we would not be here.

“As we reflect on 70 years of Nescot today, by planting this beautiful silver birch tree we are also looking to the future of education here, which we hope will be sustainable, ever-growing and long-lived. Maybe in 70 years’ time – 2094 – people here will be looking back on photos from today, admiring this tree in its full maturity, and be reflecting on education and what Nescot means to them.”

Marking the commemorative event with the tree planting, the Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Cllr Rob Geleit, said: “It is an honour to be here today to plant this commemorative tree to mark Nescot’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I hope in 70 years’ time someone similar will be doing the same thing.”

Julie added, “When this site was formally opened on 22 March 1954, the world was very different and courses such as Home Economics, Flower Arrangement, Guest House Management and Typing were on the curriculum, along with a number of more scientific and technical subjects. Today, our curriculum includes learning opportunities in electric vehicles, artificial intelligence, robotics, gaming, sectors which could barely have been imagined in 1954.

“We can be proud of the role that Nescot plays, offering increased opportunities for people from all walks of life to gain the skills and qualifications they need for a successful career and continuing to provide learning for the local community in Epsom & Ewell and our surrounding region.”

Students and staff took part in a variety of events throughout the day and during the week organised by various curriculum areas that included activities, displays and even a 1950s lesson for some of our plumbing apprentices to mark Nescot’s 70 years.

Nescot began life as Ewell County Technical College, with the first students beginning courses in September 1953 and the establishment being formally opened the following March. Explore the college’s rich history, evolution of education and community engagement on our website here.

Related reports:

[The fellowship of NESCOT](#)

[NESCOT Saturday academies for the young](#)

[Coursera & NESCOT to enhance further education](#)

[Epsom and Ewell’s Technology College 70 years young](#)

Photo: (Centre) The Mayor of Epsom & Ewell, Councillor Rob Geleit at the commemorative tree planting of a silver birch to mark Nescot’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary along with (left to right), Catering student Anna, Principal and CEO of Nescot, Julie Kapsalis, Access to Nursing student, Kirsty and Chair of Nescot Corporation, Chris Muller. Credit: Nescot

## Worcester Park school celebrates

22 April 2024



**Worcester Park’s Linden Bridge School** caters for 144 students with autism and complex social and communication needs from four to 19-years-old, including 20 in the sixth form and a residential facility which can accommodate 32 places, with pupils typically staying for two nights a week.

The school’s pupils are exceptionally well-prepared for future life, and they feel valued and secure as a result of strong relationships with staff, says a recent Ofsted report, which judges pupils’ personal development to be ‘outstanding’.

The school was inspected in January and graded ‘good’ overall, recognising the ongoing improvements made since joining **The Howard Partnership Trust** in 2021, at which time it was judged as ‘requires improvement.’

Principal, Mrs **Claire Gungah** said “We are absolutely delighted that the inspection report confirms that Linden Bridge School is a good school with an outstanding provision for the personal development of students.

“In highlighting the many strengths in our school, we are particularly pleased that the report recognises that we are delivering on our core mission, and acknowledges the hard work of staff, the Trust and support from our community in developing the school”.

Noting that the report celebrated students being a credit to the school, and demonstrated their strong relationships with staff, she added

“A huge thank you needs to go to the students who were at the heart of the process and as always, made us proud throughout the inspection showcasing their maturity, friendships, communication skills and pride in their achievements.”

The report says both the school and the Trust have ‘rightly prioritised’ improving the curriculum. Work had started at the last inspection, but it has ‘gone from strength-to-strength.’

“The school’s carefully designed curriculum is now well established in most subjects,” notes the inspector.

“Learning to read is given a high priority. A new phonics programme has been introduced since the last inspection and is now securely established. Comprehensive training has ensured that staff are confident about teaching phonics,” says the report.

“The school provides an extensive and ambitious range of events and activities. For instance, all pupils experience a sporting event and the oldest pupils are involved in organising events such as sports week.”

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## Surrey’s vulnerable without expert legal advice

22 April 2024



Surrey has become a ‘legal aid desert’, marked by a critical shortage of support services, leaving vulnerable individuals without expert advice on key issues such as, community care, education, and immigration.

The Access to Justice Report, by South West London Law Centres (SWLLC), was launched at the University of Surrey’s School of Law Access to Justice Clinic on Wednesday, 20 March, by His Honour Sir Robin Knowles CBE, Chair of the Commercial Bar Association of England & Wales. Sir Robin is a member of the Civil Justice Council and chairs its Standing Committee on access to justice for those without means.

The report highlights the need for accessible legal aid and representation and raises awareness of the challenges faced by vulnerable people in Surrey.

It catalogues the gaps in legal aid within Surrey; it highlights cases where people have had to rely on non-legal advice services instead of specialist legal services. The lack of specialist legal advice is particularly acute in employment, education and immigration.

The report shows that most social welfare advice is provided by voluntary or not-for-profit agencies, with Citizens Advice taking the leading role; however, there is a lack of specialist legal services.

People were left without expert legal advice on areas such as:

- School admissions and appeals
- School transport
- Special Education Needs
- Community care packages and complaints
- Immigration advice.

Stacey Edgar, Deputy CEO, South West London Law Centres, said:

“At the South West London Law Centres, we have directly observed the significant difficulties faced by individuals and families lacking proper guidance on matters such as immigration and education.

“Our findings now confirm that Surrey has limited mechanisms for accessing justice, signalling the urgency of leveraging insights from this new research to implement a strategy that addresses community needs.

“We’re pushing to fill these gaps because access to justice shouldn’t depend on where you live or what you can afford.”

The report proposes new initiatives to improve legal support, including a Family Law Court Help Desk, an Education Rights Advice Project, and Immigration and Asylum Caseworkers in Surrey.

Currently, the research proposals are transforming into a project to create these mechanisms in Surrey, and SWLLC is welcoming donations, volunteers, and partners to be involved in expanding access to justice to meet the needs of impacted community members.

Liz Williams, Associate Professor and Director of Clinical Legal Education at the University of Surrey, said:

“The Access to Justice Clinic at the School of Law understands that social transformation and legal impact is only possible through a collaborative approach. The Clinic has been a flourishing initiative since its launch four years ago and plans to expand in partnership with South West London Law Centres, local charities and legal professionals on a broad range of collaborations to help solve the access to justice crisis in Surrey.”

Professor Veronica Rodriguez-Blanco from the School of Law added:

“The School of Law is committed to placing access to justice at the centre of legal education in developing social sensitivity among the future lawyers that we are educating.”