

Agriculture

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NEWSLETTER

Spring 2009

IBERS courses gets top score in National Student Survey

The National Student Survey (NSS), now in its fourth year, is a poll of recent graduates conducted across the UK and commissioned by the Higher Education funding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Aberystwyth University has always enjoyed high ratings for student satisfaction in the NSS, and the 2008 results are better than ever. Agriculture and related subjects (such as animal science, countryside and equine degree courses) run at IBERS achieved the **top** score for student satisfaction in the UK.

Institute Director Professor Wayne Powell commented on the results, "this survey serves to confirm what our students already tell us about our teaching. The commitment and expertise of staff, the excellent resources such as farms,



Old College, Aberystwyth University

laboratories and the wonderful Aberystwyth environment, all combine to make IBERS an obvious first choice".

As Professor Will Haresign, Director of Learning and Teaching observed, "these results reflect the hard work that goes on within the Institute in listening to students about their needs and working hard to ensure they get the best educational experience that we can give them".

IBERS ABERYSTWYTH

Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences

List of Courses

BSc Honours

Agriculture
Agriculture with Animal Science
Agriculture with Countryside Management
Agriculture with Marketing
Agriculture with Business Studies
Organic Agriculture (1 year top up)

Foundation Degree

Agriculture

Higher National Diploma

Agriculture
Agriculture with Business
Agriculture and Countryside Conservation

Contacts

Iwan Owen:
Penri James:

(01970) 624471
igo@aber.ac.uk
wpj@aber.ac.uk

Aberystwyth graduate becomes Woman Farmer of the Year



Lynda at her farm

An Aberystwyth graduate who runs a highly successful rural business with her husband, was named Woman Farmer of the Year 2008 at the Royal Welsh Winter Fair in Llanellwedd in December.

Lynda Perkins from Dinas Island Farm, Pembrokeshire, has a passion for Suffolk sheep that began with a 'hobby flock' but she and her husband now run around 1,800 ewes. She also manages the caravan and camping site on farm, with a separate cottage enterprise, using her Agriculture and Business Studies Degree from Aberystwyth University to good effect. She now runs a small catering service too, using local produce including their own home-raised Welsh lamb and beef, tempting tourists to return to her holiday cottages by offering them delicious home-reared beef and lamb that they can take home with them. 'We wanted some added value to our business and it is going well'.

Her husband, Neil, himself another ex-student and vice-chairman of Future Farmers of Wales, acknowledges that his wife's commitment

and enthusiasm for the farm enterprise gave him the chance to travel to New Zealand to learn more about sheep management in 2005 – this led to them doubling their flock size and significantly altering their management system on his return. They met as students at Aberystwyth, in 1998.

Martin Doyle, Nat West's agricultural director, said: 'When choosing a winner, the panel of judges looked at a number of different criteria, including their part in making the farm a successful economic unit, their contribution to improving the role of women in farming and their involvement in the local community and other organisations. I have to say Lynda met all the criteria and surpassed our expectations. She will make a very good ambassador for all the other women who farm in Wales.'

Farming on top of the world

Iolo Jones, from Dinas Mawddwy in Powys, is completing his Work Experience as part of his HND course in Agriculture with Countryside Conservation at the National Trust's farm Hafod y Llan in the heart of Snowdonia.

A few years ago, the Save Snowdon appeal captured the hearts of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide, including the appeal's president, actor Sir Anthony Hopkins, who dipped into his own pocket to the tune of £1m to help buy the farm.



Hafod y Llan farm in Snowdonia

At 4,370 acres (1,769 hectares), Hafod y Llan is one of the Trust's biggest farms. It lies in the Nantgwynant valley and rises steeply from a patchwork of level fields bounded by dry stone walls through wooded slopes to the dramatic Cwm Llan and the summit of Snowdon itself.

Thousands of metres of dry stone walls and fences have been repaired or replaced, dozens of home-made gates have been hung and a farm trail has been created so that visitors can see for themselves the progress on the ground. The sheep flock now numbers 1,600 Welsh Mountain ewes, and a herd of pedigree Welsh black cattle have been reintroduced to graze the mountain pastures. The farm has gained organic status and is part of the RSPCA Freedom Foods scheme.

Arwyn Owen, the Farm Manager, welcomed the opportunity to employ a work placement student and said that 'The National Trust is eager to encourage young people into the agricultural industry and to provide students with practical experience. Increasingly, students who have a fairly strong conventional agricultural background, like Iolo, are very keen to gain experience of agri-environmental management and the associated conservation skills to complement this.'

Iolo has had a thoroughly interesting time so far, 'It is very different to our sheep and beef farm at home. I have been involved with farm work so far and I am really looking forward to spending the next 3 months with the Estate Warden on tasks like stone wall building and the like before returning to farm work at lambing. This is an ideal placement for me and ties in really well with my course.'

For a 'true taste of Wales', look to Aberystwyth – where else?

In barely 12 months of supplying its farm produce to the University's Hospitality Services and general public from its own farms, the business has gone from strength to strength. In November the University's boned and rolled lamb marketed under the 'Ger y Lli' brand ('By the Sea') was awarded the prestigious 'True Taste of Wales Food and Drinks Award 2008/09'. The awards, with more than 350 companies the length and breadth of Wales entering over 900 products, represent the very best in food and drink that Wales has to offer.

The judging panel of renowned food and cookery experts spent 3 days deliberating before coming to their final decision. 'In the end it was the quality of food and drink that shone through. The ability of sometimes quite small producers to create a product that stood out from the rest was what made all that munching and deliberating worthwhile.'

Farms Manager Huw McConochie observed that 'This is icing on the cake for us, proving over a very short period of time that we can meet the market's needs for a quality, local product while demonstrating to students that adding value to products is a way ahead for many farming businesses.'



Huw McConochie (right) and Kevan Downing (centre) with Rees Roberts of Hybu Cig Cymru, the award sponsors.

Beth determined to ensure that children learn about agriculture



Beth Harrison graduated in 2008 with a 1st Class Honours degree in Agriculture with Animal Science. She was brought up in Sheffield, a rather unlikely background for an agricultural student. At last summer's Royal Welsh Show she was presented with the Dr Richard Phillips Agricultural Student award for the best student of agriculture at a Welsh university. She is currently undertaking a year's apprenticeship with Rural Ministries in Essex.

I am not from a farming background; I grew up in a city and there are no farmers in my family. I became interested in farming when I was at secondary school, and ignoring the advice given to me by the careers advisors I decided to study agriculture at university. This decision led me to Aberystwyth to study for a degree in Agriculture with Animal Science. Despite my lack of farming experience, Aber was willing to give me a place, and it was a real privilege to gain my degree under the teaching of the staff there. I thoroughly enjoyed the four year course particularly

the year of work experience. I learnt a lot from all the herdsmen and shepherds that I worked with during the year, and when I think of my achievements I am humbled to remember the real farmers who taught me so much.

It is incredible to think now that there were so many fundamental things about agriculture that I wasn't aware of simply because I'd never been exposed to them. I think it is so important that children who are growing up in cities and towns, and are not exposed to farming in the course of their everyday lives, should be given other opportunities to learn about agriculture.

Now that I have gained my degree I want to use it in some way that will enable me to be part of the process ensuring the current generation of children are growing up aware of the agricultural industry and how their food is produced. I'm grateful for the opportunity I had to learn and experience farming relatively late on in my education. I want to be able to pass this on to children so that they can grow to love agricultural at an earlier age than I did.