



Aston University

Life & Health Sciences

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

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School of Life and Health Sciences

Reference Number: R110044

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ASTON UNIVERSITY

(www.aston.ac.uk)

Founded in 1895, Aston is a long-established research-led University known for its world-class teaching quality and strong links to industry, government and commerce.

Aston University is based in the centre of Birmingham, one of Europe's liveliest and most welcoming cities, and home to 50,000+ students. Aston University's friendly and safe 40-acre campus houses all the University's academic, social and accommodation facilities, creating a uniquely tight-knit learning environment and underlining the benefit of being one of the smaller higher-ranking universities. Work recently began on a £215m Aston Student Village development project to further enhance the campus; Phase One of the development (circa 1,300 en-suite rooms) is due to be ready for students in September 2010, and the enhanced Library, with more capacity and better facilities, is due for October 2010.

Aston University gained its charter in 1966, and has come a long way in broadening its educational excellence and student appeal across Schools in Business, Engineering and Applied Science, Life and Health Sciences, and Languages and Social Sciences. Professor Julia King became Vice-Chancellor of the University in 2006, and presided in 2007 over the definition and implementation of the [Aston 2012 Strategy](#) which has helped define Aston's positioning, and the advantages which will help sustain its further development and 'edge' in an increasingly international competitive context.

The Aston 2012 Strategy aimed at establishing Aston as a top 10 University whilst retaining the core value: delivering accessible excellence. This has been underpinned by the challenging mission to deliver excellence in the learning experience, in rigorous and relevant research, and in community engagement, specifically addressing local interests and business, with the support of a high-quality physical, communications and information infrastructure. It also highlighted core values which make Aston an outstanding place to work; these include, amongst others, valuing diversity, creating inspirational learning opportunities and research outcomes, developing 'critical reflective learners' who will make a real difference, focusing on student welfare and wellbeing, stimulating adventure and innovation, celebrating successes, and promoting integrity and sustainable growth.

Two important interlinking initiatives aim at building further on the Aston 2012 Strategy: firstly the Aston 2020 Strategy, which is at an early stage of discussion and development; secondly the Aston First transformation programme, which seeks to establish what Aston stands for, and ensure Aston fulfils its potential through branding, external projection, culture and communications.

Aston University justifiably prides itself in the diversity of its population of 9,000+ students, of whom 7,300+ are undergraduates, about 1,500 are taught postgraduate students, and 200+ are postgraduate research students. Over 20% of students come from outside the European Union, while over 15% of undergraduates are from outside the UK. Aston is ranked 13th of 113 UK universities by the 2010 Complete University Guide, and 19th in the Guardian rankings 2010,

confirming its place amongst the elite of UK Universities.

As well as offering a range of undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes, Aston works with the public and private sector to develop tailored Continuing Professional Development and Foundation Degree programmes. Aston's reputation for helping graduates secure good jobs stands out, with 82% finding graduate-level employment within six months of graduation, compared to a national average of less than 70% (relating to 2007 and 2008 graduates). This success placed Aston 9th out of all 120 UK Universities for this variable in the 2008-9 Sunday Times University Guide. Improvements in the entry grades needed and in University applications also bear witness to the growth in Aston's reputation in recent years.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE, FINANCIAL PROCEDURES

Aston's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Julia King, is the principal academic and executive officer of the University, with overall responsibility for Aston's executive management and day-to-day direction. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by four Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Professor Helen Higson (the Senior Pro-Vice-Chancellor), Dr Phil Extance, Professor Alison Halstead, and Professor Martin Griffin.

The Chief Financial Officer, Alastair Hewgill, the Director of Staff and Student Services, Adèle MacKinlay, who is also the University Secretary and Registrar, and the Director of Marketing Strategy and Communications, David Farrow, head all the support functions which provide administrative services to the University. Sheila O'Neal is the Director of Development and Alumni Relations.

Schools of Study

As indicated above, Aston's academic activity is divided into four Schools of Study, each of which is managed by an Executive Dean as follows:

Executive Dean, Aston Business School:	Professor John Edwards (Acting)
Executive Dean, Engineering and Applied Science:	Professor Robert Berry
Executive Dean, Life and Health Sciences:	Professor Helen Griffiths
Executive Dean, Languages and Social Sciences:	Professor Pam Moores

Honorary positions and governance

Aston is governed by the University Council, which comprises 10 staff members from within the executive and Schools leadership, 2 student members, and 14 appointed lay members who are business and community leaders from the Midlands and beyond – 20% are Aston alumni. The University Senate is Aston's supreme academic authority. Aston's Chancellor, Sir Michael Bett, is the honorary and ceremonial head of the University.

Financial Performance

Total income for the last full year 2010 was £110.5m, representing a 5% increase over the previous year, with 33% of income from the Funding Council, teaching fees and support grants accounting for 43%, research grants accounting for 8%, and other operating income of 16% arising from residential and rental revenues and intellectual property rights

SCHOOL OF LIFE & HEALTH SCIENCES

All the activities within the School of Life & Health Sciences affirm the mission of Aston University to be an international centre of excellence in learning & teaching, research and community engagement.

TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lhs/undergraduate/>

<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lhs/postgraduate-study/>

The School offers a range of HEFCE funded **undergraduate programmes** spanning the life and health sciences, all of which were rated as excellent in the last Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) teaching assessment.

There are currently around 1800 undergraduate students studying within the school of whom the majority are on single honours programmes. A small number (circa 300) of students are studying combined honours programmes and take options offered within the school. Entry to all single honours programmes is highly competitive with entry qualifications in excess of BBB at A-level.

The school also offers a range of **taught postgraduate programmes** focused upon the developing career needs of health professionals. The current teaching activities within the school are divided into five subject groups of optometry, pharmacy, biology, psychology and audiology each of which is led by a Subject Leader. Under each subject there are a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes each led by a Programme Director.

RESEARCH

<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lhs/research/>

In the 2008 RAE, 85% of the research in the School of Life & Health Sciences was ranked as being of international quality, and the School was ranked 3rd out of 61 UK University submissions to Allied Health Professions and Studies for quality and volume of research. The School currently has a research income of about £11m, with approximately 100 research students, (part time and full-time), who are registered in the School each year.

The School of Life & Health Sciences is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities to pursue cutting-edge research. A biomedical facility (circa £1.3m) was completed in 2003; the Aston University Day Hospital was completed in 2004 (> £12m with major funding from the Wellcome Trust, the Science Research Infrastructure fund and Advantage West Midlands). A further investment of around £3.5m in laboratory refurbishment and equipment has occurred in the last four years. In addition, the University has invested a further £3m towards the virtual Aston Research Centre for Healthy Ageing (ARCHA) encompassing researchers from all disciplines within the School and a further £3.6m towards the Aston Brain Centre (ABC).

[Research in the School of Life & Health Sciences](#) focuses on extending significantly our understanding of the processes of health and disease at the molecular, cell and whole body level and the personal and social context in which they occur. Our goal is to apply the knowledge gained to clinical products, policy and practice across the age-span.

Questions that we're addressing include:

- What are the basic neural processes that mediate brain function and sensory perception? How are these maintained over the life span, and how are they changed by disease?
- How might an improved understanding of the behavioural processes that influence the uptake and effectiveness of treatment be applied to cost effective interventions for the prevention and management of disease?
- How can our understanding of biological processes at the molecular and cellular level be applied to prevent disease and age-related decline, improve diagnostics specificity, and inform the development of improved medicines and medical devices?

SPECIALISED RESEARCH FACILITIES IN THE SCHOOL OF LIFE & HEALTH SCIENCES:

1. Biomedical Sciences

Biomedical Sciences have invested in scale-up facilities for protein expression and purification; this is supported by a range of chromatographic separation equipment (HPLCs, FPLCs, amino acid analyser) which can be used for DNA, protein and carbohydrate analysis. Real-time PCR is available for quantification of specific gene expression and our proteomics facility includes peptide sequence analysis by LC-MS/MS. Cell analysis work is also undertaken using flow cytometry resources, confocal, epifluorescence and atomic force microscopy (shared with the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences) while *In vivo* investigations of disease process, progression and management are undertaken within the newly refurbished Biomedical Facility.

The new ARCHA imaging facility provides research groups with access to state-of-the-art equipment enabling users to carry out a range of experiments from sample screening to deep tissue imaging. The new facility, located in the main building consists of a Leica Widefield Fluorescence Microscope Leica SP5 multiphoton Laser Scanning confocal microscope.

2. Pharmaceutical Sciences

Novel compound discovery is supported by computer aided drug design; synthetic chemistry laboratories are well furnished for synthesis of novel entities and understanding is further extended by determination of molecular structure using x-ray crystallography. Drug Delivery and Drug Dosage From design is undertaken in our Pharmaceutics laboratories which are furnished with a large range of state of the art analytical equipment (e.g. pharmacopeial apparatus, particle sizing equipment; Differential Scanning Calorimetry; Thermogravimetric Analysis). Small molecule chemical synthesis and analysis facilities include high-field NMR, GC-MS and LC-MS.

3. Aston University Day Hospital

Aston University Day Hospital is a >£10m flagship clinical research centre and day hospital which accommodates Optegra (ophthalmology services) and Birmingham Children's Hospital Cochlear implant team. The Day Hospital, which opened in the spring of 2004, is designed to support the core health research and clinical activities within the School. It is a European centre of excellence in Ophthalmic research (cornea and refractive surgery, human myopia, vascular imaging) and other health-related research including paediatric Cochlear Implantation and Rehabilitation.

4. The Aston Brain Centre

The Aston Brain Centre is a research facility comprising specialist assessment and laboratory provision, primarily for the School of Life and Health Sciences, although collaborations across the University are established and encouraged.

Operational from July 2011 the newly constructed ABC building will accommodate an integrated research facility for the study of neurodevelopment in health and disease. It provides a novel training centre for Magnetoencephalography (MEG) and Electroencephalographic studies incorporating translational and humane research. The ABC was funded through £3.6M Science Research Infrastructure Funding (SRIF) together with £800k from Aston University, and houses The Wellcome Trust laboratory for MEG studies, first established in 1999 to for the first whole brain MEG system in the UK, and soon to be the location of the world's first high-resolution paediatric-compliant MEG system (supported by The Wellcome Trust grant - Ref: 088314/Z/09/Z). The facility also houses the Development and Dyslexia Assessment Unit and the Clinical Neurophysiology Unit, comprising two dedicated Sleep Laboratories, 128 channel dense array EEG dense, a Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation Laboratory and a sound proofed auditory laboratory for clinical testing. A dedicated computer analysis and training suite provides an environment for collaboration and integration of scientists and techniques from diverse disciplines.

5. Clinical Audiology Research Centre

This centre opened in September 2006, and includes sound-treated test rooms and specialised equipment for clinical and applied hearing research.

The centre provides a specialist audiology clinical service to the local area as well as supporting the research of the Audiology staff and research students.

6. Health Psychology

Research is supported by a number of individual testing cubicles and a newly built social observation and focus group facility. The Nutrition and Behaviour laboratory was launched in 2007 and houses six individual test areas, each equipped with a range of equipment for assessing psychological status and feeding behaviour.

Organisation

The School is led by an appointed Executive Dean, Professor Helen Griffiths, and operates through four key committees: Senior Management Committee, School Board, Teaching Committee and Research Committee.

The Executive Dean is supported by a Deputy Dean and four Associate Deans. All undergraduate and postgraduate programmes have a designated leader and are delivered by the staff from the subject groupings. The diagram below summarises the current management structure:

