



# Philanthropy at Keele

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## IMPACT REPORT

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*Looking back at 2025*





# Introduction from the Vice-Chancellor



Since joining Keele in September, I've had the privilege of meeting a number of our incredible alumni and supporters and learning what inspires this community to give back in such meaningful ways.

I've been truly inspired by the generosity shown through gifts that support our academic and student community, not only financially, but also through volunteering opportunities. It's also fantastic to see more corporate partners recognising the importance of philanthropy as part of their own strategy and social responsibility, and choosing Keele as a partner in this mission. I hope you enjoy reading about initiatives such as the Horiba UK Scholarships and others featured in this edition.

It's equally rewarding to hear from students whose lives have been transformed by philanthropic support, whether through new initiatives like the Placements Bursary and Mental Health Charter Project, or more established programmes such as the Keele Key Fund.

Looking ahead to 2026, we are developing a new strategy and there will be a place for philanthropy at the very heart of Keele's ambitions. The support of our alumni and friends, through volunteering and donations, will be more vital than ever. This magazine showcases just some of the remarkable ways you make a difference to Keele and beyond. I hope these stories demonstrate the impact of your support and how deeply it is valued by our entire community.

Yours sincerely

Kevin Shakesheff  
Vice-Chancellor

## Keele launches innovative new placement bursary

Education is always evolving and at Keele University we pride ourselves on providing an outstanding, innovative education for all, that goes beyond a student's time at university and prepares them for their future.

We know how important the right work experience is in helping graduates to secure their first job and that's why at Keele, for our undergraduate courses starting in September 2025, every course\* offers students a placement opportunity.

A placement allows students to gain hands-on experience, develop key skills, and get a better understanding of the world of work they are interested in, all helping to boost employability

upon graduation. It also allows for the development of important networks and connections, which can be vital for a future career.

However, at Keele we also understand that these opportunities aren't always accessible for all and we want to ensure that financial constraints aren't preventing opportunity. With generous funding from alumni and supporters, we have therefore launched our new placement bursary.

This £500 non-means-tested bursary is available to support students who will be completing a non-mandatory placement – both curricular and extra-curricular (but brokered by the University).

A brokered placement refers to an extra-curricular placement opportunity where the University has actively supported the process. This could include helping to design the job description, organising interviews, facilitating discussions between the student and employer, and ensuring that both parties agree on the placement terms.

Sharon Farrow, Head of Placements and Projects, says: "The Keele Placement Bursary, generously supported by our alumni and supporters, has been a true catalyst for students on placement. It goes beyond financial assistance by providing practical and holistic support that truly enhances the placement experience. From covering essential costs like travel and professional attire to easing the pressure of living expenses, the bursary allows students to focus on learning and contributing meaningfully in their roles.

"This support fosters confidence, reduces stress, and ensures that every student, regardless of background, can access valuable opportunities without barriers. Thanks to our alumni and supporters, placements become a transformative experience that prepares students for their future careers."

Here, some students share the impact that the bursary has made to their university and placement experience:

### Imogen Taylor School of Psychology

**Placement provider:** Keele University, School of Psychology and School of Allied Health Professions and Pharmacy

**Placement title:** Neuropsychology Research Assistant

"The placement bursary has contributed to the purchase of my bus pass, as it is needed for me to travel to do my research. It has also helped to keep me out of debt, as that was something I was worried would happen this year. This bursary has taken a bunch of stress off my shoulders and has enabled me to commute and afford better food for lunches and dinners. I'd like to thank alumni and supporters for this bursary as I can imagine the impact it has had on all the other students as well as myself."

### James Bruce Keele Business School

**Placement provider:** Novus

**Placement title:** Inbound Logistics

"The generosity of the placement bursary ensured financial security in an otherwise insecure first month of my placement. Having moved away from home, my student finance had gone towards my rent, and I had some concerns about being able to start (and maintain) healthy habits during my placement due to not being paid till the end of the month. The £500 bursary offered peace of mind that I had something to fall back on, not having to change the standard of living that I wanted. It allowed me to eat healthily, as well as starting at a new gym and tennis club.

\*excluding Apprenticeships and 'top-up' degrees

Through the possibility of the bursary, I was able to take solid steps in the foundation of improving my physical and mental health."

### Maria Alcocer Valdivieso School of Life Sciences

**Placement provider:** Pfizer Limited

**Placement title:** Clinical Study Operations Undergraduate

"The £500 bursary has been a huge help during my placement. As an international student, I needed to book flights home to Spain for Christmas, but because my travel dates were limited, I had to book during peak holiday season, which was much more expensive than I had planned. The bursary allowed me to cover those costs and also helped me pay for train tickets back to Keele in November to attend a careers fair representing Pfizer. Thanks to this support, I've been able to manage these expenses without worrying, and focus on making the most of my placement. The bursary made a real difference!"

### Mikail Valibayov School of Chemical and Physical Science

**Placement provider:** Lonza

**Placement title:** IP Student Purification Development

"The bursary made a huge difference to my placement experience. I felt incredible support from the University by receiving it. It allowed me to have a financial "cushion" to enter the world of savings and become more responsible and organised in my spending. It helped me cover a significant portion of my rent and allowed me to save for my commute and groceries. I would definitely support this initiative for future placement students as it had a substantial positive impact on my experience."



### Tammy Belle School of Humanities and Social Sciences

"For my placement year, I am commuting into and around London 2-3 days a week, so this bursary has been greatly beneficial in helping me with my travel expenses. I am lucky enough that my placement is paid, but for my first month I relied largely on this bursary to fund my travel especially considering how quickly train tickets and London transport payments can add up! It made a huge difference to me as it was one less thing to worry about during an already hectic and nerve-wracking time for me commuting and starting a 9-5 for the first time. Without this bursary, I am sure I would've struggled significantly with comfortably making my way into London each day and I'm sure this would've impacted how quickly I settled into my new role."



## What are the benefits of a work placement?

- Provide a variety of ways to kick-start a career, increase skills, and clarify goals.
- Gain practical experience and apply theoretical knowledge in a real-world setting.
- Learn more about various career paths.
- Acquire an understanding of how businesses function.
- Build industry connections.
- Employers use placement opportunities to recruit into their graduate jobs.
- Develop the soft skills employers value including teamwork, decision-making, and time management.
- Collaborate with a broader and more varied range of individuals.



# How philanthropy is helping to transform maths education in Stoke-on-Trent

Thanks to the remarkable generosity of pioneer alumnus Alan Halfpenny, Keele has been able to lead an initiative aimed at improving maths attainment across Stoke-on-Trent and North Staffordshire.

Alan's gift funded the project for two years, enabling Keele to work with the Maths Excellence Partnership to tackle one of the most significant barriers to progression for young people: GCSE maths. For many students, success in this subject determines their next steps, whether that's university, vocational training, or entering the workforce.

An Ofsted report in 2016 highlighted the urgent need to improve maths outcomes in Stoke-on-Trent schools and to foster collaboration among teachers and leaders. In response, the Maths Excellence Partnership was established to raise attainment, share best practice, and inspire future educators. Keele's involvement has brought a new dimension to this mission, aligning with the Office for Students' call for universities to work closely with schools to improve exam results.

With Alan's support, Keele has hosted a series of targeted activities designed to make a measurable difference:

- Student-focused sessions: Year 11 students attend intensive exam preparation workshops, while Year 10 students benefit from transition activities that lay strong foundations for GCSE success.
- Teacher development: Events for teachers and school leaders promote innovative teaching strategies and sustainable improvements in classroom practice.
- Mentorship and inspiration: Keele student ambassadors serve as mentors, gaining valuable experience and encouraging a new generation to consider careers in maths education.

These efforts not only help students achieve higher grades but also aim to embed a long-term culture of excellence in maths teaching across the region.

Alan's vision and generosity have made this possible. His commitment ensures that hundreds of young people in our local communities have the chance to unlock their potential and aspire to positive futures.



## Alumnus funding supports Cherry Tree & Arboretum placement student

The Phil Davies Fund was created by alumnus Professor Phil Davies in support of Keele's Arboretum and National Collection of Flowering Cherry Trees. In 2026 this funding will also support the first ever Cherry Tree Assistant, a fully-funded placement opportunity for a current student in Life Sciences.

Placement student Elliott Walton (pictured above), who will act as the Cherry Tree Assistant, will be photographing the cherry blossoms to create 360-degree views of the trees in flower and adding digital integration, allowing the blossom to be viewed all year round on a smartphone. This is all part of a wider project to create a virtual blossom journey for those who cannot get to physically see the trees in flower in the spring.

Dr Sarah Taylor, incoming Curator of Keele's National Collection, says:

"As well as additional support for the arboretum team, this is a fantastic opportunity for Elliott. The wider Cherry Tree Group are looking forward to supporting Elliott in this initiative and hope that this marks a new period of increased student engagement with both the collection and the arboretum."

Looking ahead to starting the placement, Elliott says: "I am a 2nd Year Ecology and Conservation student with a long-standing passion for photography and preserving nature, and I am honoured to be part of such a landmark project. I hope to be an integral part of the team and, whilst developing my knowledge, make a meaningful contribution assisting with our cherry tree collection here at Keele University. I wish to express my thanks for this role being graciously funded, as it will help finance the development of my long-term career goals within this field".



# A spotlight on volunteering

Every year, alumni and supporters donate their invaluable time and expertise to Keele to enrich the educational experience for so many students. Below is a sample of the many ways alumni have volunteered, and some of the motivations behind doing so during 2025:

## Delivering a lecture to current students

Thom Bartley (Law & Business Administration, Class of 2008) returned to campus to lead an Industry Voices session, an extra-curricular lecture series aimed at those with an interest in the creative industries.

*"It was amazing to be back! As a working-class kid from the Black Country, university introduced me to people from all walks of life. While a degree is important, I think the real value of university – especially Keele – is in the relationships it fosters. Those connections and experiences have played a huge role in shaping my path, and I wanted to do the same for others by coming back to speak to current students about my career to date."*

Some alumni, like Adam Konowe (see 'Keele in the USA' below), also join academic sessions remotely via Microsoft Teams – showing location and time zone are no barriers to a lifelong connection to Keele.

## Careers networking

During the spring, Gareth Smith (Geoscience, Class of 2004) revisited campus to take part in a Q&A session with students looking to do placements, and progress careers, in the area of geoscience. Gareth, a Senior Reservoir Geologist & Sedimentologist at Petrostrat, also brought current colleagues back with him for the event, so that students could benefit from his wider network.

*"I had four brilliant years at Keele, the place which put me on the path to where I am today. I could, therefore, not pass up the opportunity to go back and to present to the geoscience undergraduates along with four other colleagues, where we were able to engage with the young up-and-coming geoscientists of our future."*

*"It was nostalgic and great to chat with familiar faculty member faces and to discuss how things had evolved and developed over the years, as well as to discuss potential ventures and opportunities which Keele, its students, and Petrostrat may develop together."*

*"Despite all these years, the good old campus feel came flooding back and the opportunities afforded to me by the geoscience faculty are still very much appreciated and will never be forgotten. We spoke to the students about what potential careers are out there and we recalled a few funny stories along the way; my encounter with a brown bear whilst in the field got a few giggles. My colleagues and I had a great time and were made to feel very welcome and we are all actively continuing to engage and to forward our relationship with Keele."*

## Hosting reunions for alumni around the globe

Fazal Mohamed (Information Technology, Class of 2001) lives in Sri Lanka, where we have a thriving alumni community, much thanks to the efforts of Fazal and a core team of eight peers who organise an annual reunion for alumni in Colombo, timed alongside with other Keele Day celebrations around the globe.

*"The regular reunion of the Keele alumni in Sri Lanka takes me back in time to the memories of wonderful camaraderie and learning experience of the Keele Masters programme in Sri Lanka. The quality of the qualifications availed to me by Keele opened many a path in my career and to other fellow Keele alumni. The knowledge and insight I gained cannot be measured. I am honoured to keep the light of Keele burning in Sri Lanka with other fellow Keele alumni by being involved with my batchmates in organising these regular reunions and will certainly continue this tradition in the days to come. Our alumni group have already formed the 'Alumni Association of University of Keele (Sri Lanka)' and would welcome new members."*

## Reviewing funding applications

Matthew Critchley (Psychology, Class of 2020) took an active role in the Keele Key Fund allocation process in 2025, when he returned to campus to join the panel who decided which student and staff applications received the available funding.

## Inspiring alumni

We celebrate our global alumni community and their successes through 'Inspiring Alumni' profiles, which are promoted across digital and physical signage. We are incredibly grateful to the alumni who are willing to share their story in these features, which help enhance Keele's reputation and enthuse today's students about their future careers.

Read inspiring alumni profiles: [keele.ac.uk/study/inspiring-alumni](https://keele.ac.uk/study/inspiring-alumni)



## Keele in the USA

Adam Konowe (Study Abroad, Class of 1989) is the President of Keele in the USA and participates in a variety of opportunities to support Keele from afar each year, as well as frequently on campus. In 2025, this included speaking on a Keele Business School lecture module, participating in Keele's Curriculum Design Community of Practice, meeting with members of Keele's senior team, and conducting a workshop for Keele Drama Society, as well as hosting a number of in-person events within the US – including various alumni reunions, and welcoming Keele students visiting a US university (the University of North Carolina – Wilmington) as part of their course.

*"Attending Keele University for the 1988-89 academic year was an invaluable study-abroad experience that continues to pay dividends to this day, so I readily volunteer my time here in the US and when I return to the UK. Sharing perspectives related to my work in journalism, public relations, marketing, higher education, and theatre with Keele senior staff, faculty, and students helps extend the value of these experiences for everyone involved by bridging the gap between campus life and beyond."*

## Walled Garden allotments

Maintaining our beautiful campus would not be possible without volunteer support, notably working with our Arboretum and National Collection of Flowering Cherries, and within the heritage Walled Garden close to Keele Hall. This garden contains eleven allotment beds managed by the Keele community, including two dedicated to student groups. Originally a kitchen garden, this historic area continues to serve as a productive space that supports sustainability, wellbeing, and community engagement.

Student and staff volunteers, currently led by two dedicated PhD students Jacob Noble and Brenda Flores Cuevas, use the dedicated student community beds to grow seasonal vegetables and pollinator-friendly plants, developing practical skills and a stronger connection to nature. The allotments also provide a quiet outdoor space that encourages social interaction and supports mental health.

The remaining beds are cared for by staff and community members, creating a collaborative environment where knowledge and resources are shared. This mix of users reflects Keele's commitment to sustainability and inclusive participation.

Produce grown in the garden is shared among participants – sometimes enjoyed together in the garden, sometimes at home – with recipes and photos exchanged through an active WhatsApp group. The Walled Garden demonstrates how sustainability can be integrated into everyday life, giving students and staff the chance to contribute to a greener campus while reducing waste and promoting local, low-carbon food systems.





# Stewart McLaughlin Scholarship celebrates its third year

The Stewart McLaughlin Scholarship provides a transformational bursary covering one year of accommodation costs for a first-year MSci Paramedic Science student.

Andy McLaughlin, Keele alumnus, son of Stewart McLaughlin who the scholarship is named after, and Managing Director of MIS Group, says: "Chris McLaughlin and I are so proud to continue this programme with the excellent team at Keele University. We shouldn't underestimate the value of our paramedics and what they deal with on a day-to-day basis, so hopefully this helps in a small way. Through our subsidiary, MIS Emergency Systems, we work with paramedics and ambulance professionals on a daily basis, and we both feel it is important

to give back to the sector and this is one way we can achieve that, by supporting our next generation of outstanding paramedics".

The second recipient of the scholarship, Eunice Kisoka, said: "I would like to express my sincere gratitude to both Andy and Chris McLaughlin for their generosity in providing me with this scholarship.

This support has given me financial security, allowing me to purchase essential supplies such as uniforms, a stethoscope, and textbooks.

"Beyond covering these necessities, this scholarship has enabled me to fully engage in my academic journey, fostering both resilience and personal growth. By alleviating financial stress, it has allowed me to focus wholeheartedly on my studies and work toward achieving academic and professional success.

"This incredible opportunity has truly enhanced my university experience and future prospects."



## Vreeburg Bursary supports research into stroke rehabilitation

Poppy Downing is a part-time Physiotherapy Lecturer in the School of Allied Health Professions and Pharmacy and has been working in this role since October 2020.

Poppy completed her BSc in Physiotherapy in 2002 and her MSc in Neurological Rehabilitation in 2011, both at Keele University. Alongside her role at Keele, she also continues to work locally as a neurological physiotherapist.

Poppy is currently seconded into a Research Physiotherapy Role for two-and-a-half years, where she will be working on the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) funded project, 'Teaching carers to deliver physical therapy for the upper limb post stroke (TaPpS): a feasibility study'. This study is being completed with Keele University and the Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust. It aims to investigate if a specific physiotherapy treatment technique, that aims to improve sensation and movement of the arm following stroke, is acceptable and feasible to be performed at home by informal carers, such as family members.

Phase 1 of the study was to develop a training package and this is nearing completion. Poppy has been working with the research team, physiotherapists, stroke survivors, and carers from across the West Midlands and Cheshire to co-design how the training of the physiotherapy technique will be implemented in phase 2 of the study.

Alongside working on the TaPpS study, Poppy will be completing her PhD and looking into carer burden and how the physiotherapy treatment techniques for the upper limb are carried out at home by carers in greater detail. This research is complemented by the National Health Service 10-year plan, where self-management strategies are highlighted as an essential component of shaping and empowering patients with long-term conditions to take greater control of their health.

Poppy has been successful in applying for the Vreeburg Bursary, funded by a philanthropic gift to the University which aims to support a physiotherapist to complete research into upper limb recovery following a stroke. This generous gift has provided Poppy with the funds required to undertake her PhD and some associated training. This amazing gift not only supports Poppy but the outcomes from this research have the potential to support rehabilitation of the upper limb for many stroke survivors in the future.





# Keele and HORIBA UK: Partnering to drive diversity in STEM

Keele University is proud to be among the first partners of the newly launched HORIBA Foundation UK, a philanthropic initiative started by HORIBA UK dedicated to advancing scientific research and broadening participation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) higher education across the UK.

The HORIBA Foundation UK was created to tackle two interconnected challenges:

- Removing barriers for students from underrepresented or deprived backgrounds to make STEM education more accessible.
- Supporting scientific research that addresses the pressing challenges of our time, in line with HORIBA's global mission to utilise science and technology for a sustainable future.

Through this partnership, Keele will host the HORIBA Scholarships, designed to support talented postgraduate students from diverse backgrounds in STEM. This initiative reflects Keele's commitment to inclusivity and excellence in education, and HORIBA's vision of empowering new voices in science.

Dr Simon FitzGerald, Head of Science and Technology at HORIBA UK, said:

"We are delighted to partner with Keele to establish the HORIBA Scholarships, our first programme specifically supporting a more diverse postgraduate STEM student community. Keele's commitment to an exemplary teaching experience, their willingness to develop a scholarship scheme that really met our vision, and the obvious shared values we hold, was most appealing.

"The HORIBA Foundation UK is an advocate and supporter of action to create a more diverse scientific community in the UK. This will ensure a broader range of viewpoints are brought together, which means better questions are asked, leading to more effective and impactful solutions.

"Our foundation is committed to empowering new voices and unlocking fresh thinking that will bring new insights to the challenges of today and tomorrow. Keele University is a valued partner in this quest, and we look forward to encouraging and supporting our HORIBA Scholars as they continue their journey into science."

Keele University is proud to work alongside HORIBA in providing these scholarships, ensuring that talented individuals from all backgrounds have the opportunity to thrive in STEM and contribute to a more inclusive and innovative scientific future.



# History Travel Fund started by Keele alumna and family

For Rebecca Pierce, who studied History at Keele between 2015 and 2019, it was important to give back to an institution and an academic community that gave her so much.

Rebecca said: "My time at Keele was so enjoyable and immensely valuable to me that I am pleased to now be able to give back in some way. My mother, Sara, and I are delighted to be able to sponsor the History Travel Fund and Humanities Student of the Year Award. The Student of the Year award is particularly sentimental as it is given in honour of my grandparents. They were huge believers in education, its power to change lives, and help people reach their full potential. As a first-generation university student, I hope this contribution goes some small way to giving a student the opportunities my education has afforded me."

## Recipients of the History Travel Fund talk about the impact it made:

"I am delighted to have been awarded funding to support my research thanks to a generous donation to the History department this year. My PhD thesis recovers women in the print trade in the Midlands between 1700 and 1830. These booksellers, printers, librarians, and supporting traders had an essential role in communication and education in the enlightenment period, yet my project is the first major study of their work. Finding women who have been traditionally overlooked or obscured in historical accounts requires a great deal of archive-based work, and this funding will enable me to visit more archives across the region and restore the lives and work of more women who have been lost from the record until now." **Joanne Butler**

"Thanks to a generous donation, I have been granted a bursary to help fund a visit to the Lambeth Palace Library to research the books of Buildwas Abbey. My PhD project explores the history of the major monastic houses of Shropshire, in the context of their position on the Welsh border.

"I have been lucky enough to receive a grant through a donation to the History department that will allow me to visit the Searchlight Archives at the University of Northampton.

The Searchlight Archive is a major collection of material documenting the activities of British and international fascist and racist organisations and also holds Searchlight magazine, which has published on racism, antisemitism, and fascism for 50 years. These collections will be vital to my research not only due to their scope but also because of Searchlight's long-time affiliation with a local antiracist and antifascist organisations." **Ben Simpson**

"There are few surviving artefacts from Buildwas Abbey, and the books will allow me to gain an insight into the religious and intellectual history of the house. The books have not been digitised and the visit forms an important part of my research. As a self-funded post graduate researcher, I am extremely grateful to the donors to the Keele History Travel Fund for enabling my visit." **Cathy Clarke**

"During my PhD I will be studying the politics of race in North Staffordshire from roughly 1960 to 2020. My research will focus on the changing demography of the local area and the challenges these communities have faced. I will also be focusing on the work of local activist and community groups in supporting these communities and their attempts to challenge historic societal and institutional racism locally, nationally and globally as well as combating the far-right in the area.







Giselle Pearson

# Empowering futures through Keele's Student of the Year Award

Keele University's summer graduation once again showcased the life-changing impact of philanthropy through the Neil and Gina Smith Student of the Year Award.

Established by Keele alumnus and donor Neil Smith (Class of 1980) and his wife Gina, the award provides a £5,000 prize to a final-year undergraduate who demonstrates exceptional achievement. For over two decades, Neil and Gina's generosity has ensured that Keele can celebrate and support students whose talent and determination inspire others.

## Neil reflected on his motivation:

"My wonderful experiences at Keele undoubtedly laid the strong foundation for my future career, as well as allowing me to form friendships for life - both with the staff as well as with fellow students. I have known no other place like it - before or since - and, as with every other Keele graduate, it has a special place in my heart.

"It was very important to me that I recognised this by giving back to the University and the student community and, for the last 20 years now, I have been funding the Student of the Year award. The award celebrates a student of outstanding achievement and it never ceases to amaze me what rich talent we are able to attract and nurture at Keele.

"My hope is that my support allows each of them, in some small way, to excel as they embark on a life beyond Keele and contribute fully to society as a whole."

This year's recipient, Giselle Pearson, embodied that vision. Graduating with first-class honours in Computer Science and Mathematics, Giselle overcame significant personal challenges to excel academically and make a lasting contribution to Keele's community. Her leadership in founding the University's first Aerial Dance Society, which grew to over 100 members and earned national recognition, demonstrated her commitment to enriching student life.

Giselle's journey to graduation was far from straightforward. After a severe mental health crisis in her teens and a series of diagnoses, including autism and ADHD, she rebuilt her life step by step. Returning to education as a mature student, she embraced every opportunity Keele offered. "I absolutely loved my Foundation Year," she said. "It gave me the confidence to start my degree knowing I was in the right place."

Alongside her studies, Giselle discovered aerial dance - a passion that transformed her outlook. "When I started going to aerial dance, I was really depressed, and my eating disorder was probably the worst it had been. But it gave me something to enjoy, and eventually, it became my obsession. When I realised Keele didn't have a society for aerial dance, I knew I had to set one up." Today, that society thrives, and Giselle has gone on to win national and international titles, as well as numerous Students' Union awards for her contribution to campus life.

Receiving the Student of the Year Award was a defining moment for Giselle. She said: "When I found out I'd won, I cried a lot of happy tears. Graduating was such an emotional experience, and so special to do in front of my family. They know how dark a place I was in when I was younger, and to be able to share my success with them now means a lot to me."

The award has also helped Giselle look ahead to the future with confidence. "In September, I started my PhD at Keele, studying dyslexia in computer interaction design. I want to improve how we present text and design digital interfaces for dyslexics, because as the world becomes more digitally focused, accessibility matters more than ever. I also hope to set up my own aerial dance studio in the future."



Neil Smith





# Celebrating creativity: Open Art Exhibition thrives with alumni support

This summer, the Three Counties Open Art Exhibition 2025 transformed the historic Fenton Town Hall Ballroom into a vibrant showcase of creativity. Now in its 29th year, the exhibition brought together 97 artists from Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Shropshire, attracting 1,445 visitors during its three-week run.

From painting and sculpture to textiles, photography, and even olfactory experiences, the event celebrated artistic talent across generations and backgrounds, offering free access and a welcoming space for all.

Organised in partnership with ArtsKeele, ACAVA Spode, Appetite, Barewall Gallery, Restoke, and other local stakeholders, the exhibition received over 300 entries, with 42% of selected artists exhibiting for the first time, ensuring a fresh and dynamic show.

Highlights included the Arthur Berry Centenary tribute, interactive installations, and a lively awards evening that honoured outstanding contributions to the arts.

The programme extended beyond the gallery walls with artist residencies, drop-in workshops, and community-led projects. Visitors explored everything from glass painting and lino printing to textile mapping and bamboo sculpture, encouraging creativity and connection. The Arthur Berry Corner, delivered in partnership with the Heritage Lottery Funded Arthur Berry 100 project, offered an immersive experience celebrating the iconic local artist.

*"Art has the power to bring people together, spark conversations, and inspire change. This exhibition is proof of that."* – Visitor

*"Seeing so many voices expressed through creativity reminds us that culture is a living, breathing part of our communities."* – Visitor

This year's success was made possible thanks to the generous support of Keele alumnus Chris Ensor and his wife Val Ensor, whose significant donation helped develop and expand the programme. Chris's commitment to fostering creativity exemplifies the power of alumni giving – enabling opportunities that enrich communities and celebrate culture.

Audience feedback was overwhelmingly positive: 98% of visitors said they would recommend the exhibition, praising the diversity, quality, and inclusive atmosphere. Many described Fenton Town Hall as a "hidden gem," with its historic character and onsite café adding to the experience.

Keele's involvement in the arts is not new. From its founding members, the University has championed cultural initiatives as part of its civic mission. The Stross Collection, a remarkable donation of art to Keele, remains a cornerstone of our artistic heritage. Over the decades, Keele has nurtured creative societies, student-led projects, and partnerships that have shaped the cultural life of our region. From drama and music groups to public exhibitions and collaborative research, the University continues to play a vital role in connecting communities through creativity.

As we look ahead to the next chapter of the Open Art Exhibition in its 30th year, we invite alumni and friends to join us in shaping its future. Your support can help us continue to champion local talent, deliver inclusive arts experiences, and keep creativity thriving in our region.

Find out more and get involved: [keele.ac.uk/artskeele](https://keele.ac.uk/artskeele) or follow @ArtsKeele on social media.





# First ever Harper & Keele Veterinary School Graduates

This year, we proudly celebrated the graduation of the very first cohort from the Harper & Keele Veterinary School – a truly historic milestone.

An important part of this occasion was recognising not only the academic excellence of our graduates but also their social contributions as they embark on the next stage of their careers. We were delighted that this vision was supported by generous philanthropic gifts, which funded a new programme of prizes to honour these outstanding achievements.

Professor Ronald Jones OBE, Emeritus Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia, has provided a generous gift in support of the HKVS Outstanding Academic Achievement Award. Professor Jones said: "I had taught Professor Matt Jones, Head of Harper & Keele Veterinary School, as he had studied on my anaesthesia elective as a student. I had also met up with him on several occasions and discussed the School from a Dean's perspective as I had held the post at Liverpool.

"As this was a new School, I anticipated that there would not be many prizes and therefore supporting one philanthropically would be a good thing to do. In addition, I am a proud Salopian and like to support unique ventures in my home county."

Catarina Serra, the winner of the above prize, said: "Receiving the Outstanding Academic Achievement Award was an incredible honour and a testament to the dedication, passion, and hard work throughout my academic journey. This award represents the culmination of years of study and practice alongside experts in the field. I am immensely grateful for the support of my family and friends, professors, tutors, academic support staff, veterinary surgeons and professionals, and peers, whose availability and patience were invaluable in shaping my path and allowing me to overcome every challenge and obstacle along the way.



Professor Ronald Jones and Catarina

"This recognition motivates me to continue learning and trying my best, with the goal of making meaningful contributions to the health and wellbeing of animals and the veterinary community. And above all, I am thrilled to embark on this incredibly rewarding career."

Harper & Keele Veterinary School were also greatly appreciative to receive funding from the Harper Adams University Development Trust, Keele alumni and supporters, IVC Evidensia, and CRC Press – Taylor & Francis Group.

## A lasting legacy

Keele University continues to be in awe of our wonderful supporters and alumni who choose to leave a gift in their Will to support Keele long after they have gone. Pioneer alumnus Richard Float is just one of those who chose to celebrate his lifelong connection to Keele in this way.

Richard (History & Politics, Class of 1955) was part of the second cohort to come to the University College of North Staffordshire, now Keele University.

Whilst there he met Margaret Blake, a geography and geology student from the first cohort who became his wife in 1958 after he completed his National Service. They began married life in Birmingham and their first child, Susan, arrived in 1961. Soon after, they relocated to Leicester and Susan was joined by a sister, Marilyn.

Following the move to Leicester, Richard remained at the University of Leicester for the rest of his career. He became estates bursar, and the university credits him with playing

a crucial part in its development, including new buildings such as the Attenborough Tower and the medical school.

He retained a keen interest in Keele and during its 50th anniversary year, he made a generous gift which funded the prize for the design of the Forest of Light, the sculpture at the heart of campus.

Richard was a club level sprinter and then became involved in officiating at athletics as a starter at the Commonwealth Games in 1986 and 2002. He also helped in the administration of the sport starting from his time at Keele.

Thinking about the future? Did you know that including a charity like Keele in your Will could reduce the rate of inheritance tax on your estate?

Richard sadly passed away in 2024. He was predeceased by Margaret in 2007 but is survived by his two daughters and their husbands and four grandchildren.

In his Will, Richard made a legacy gift in support of a capital project on campus. A gift that will support our university to continue to flourish.



**Find out more:**  
keele.ac.uk/about/  
givingtokeele/  
howcanigive/giftinwill

# Alisha Zaman Memorial Prize 2025

The Alisha Zaman Memorial Prize was created in memory of Alisha Zaman who was a Biological Sciences student at Keele (2017-2020) when she sadly passed away, aged 21.

Alisha served as a Student Ambassador, Class Voice Representative, and International Social Media Coordinator, roles in which she supported students and represented the University to the best of her ability.

She loved nature and was kind to vulnerable animals, with the quote *"be kind to everything that lives"* reflecting her own philosophy of life.

The winner of the prize in 2025 was Joe Gough, who said:

"I am honoured and immensely moved to have been recommended as 2025's recipient of the Alisha Zaman Memorial Prize. The kindness and dedication that Alisha showed towards her peers at Keele and beyond is something from which all of us can learn, and as a fellow nature lover her kindness towards the natural world is extremely admirable to me.

"My time studying at Keele has been a lifechanging experience and has provided me with the opportunity to explore my interest in wildlife conservation and meet countless wonderful people while doing so. In addition to my studies I've had the privilege of representing the university as a student ambassador, been invited to provide a student voice as part of the Keele 100 and SDG Impact Committee, and been given the chance to spend two years serving as a committee member for the Keele Wildlife Society (first as its social media manager, and later as its president).

"I have also had the chance to earn a gold volunteering certificate from the Keele SU by helping to remove invasive plants from the campus, assisting in digitising the Pottery Museum's moth collection, hosting a booth at a local science fair and caring for rehomed animals in a local wildlife sanctuary.

"Through my dissertation I was also able to explore my interest in science communication and conservation-based education by studying the impact that enclosure type has on learning and engagement in zoo visitors. I will be graduating this year with a 1st Class Honours, and am immensely grateful to the Life Sciences team and the many wonderful friends who have made it possible for me to do so.

"I would like to extend my deepest thanks to Alisha's family for their generosity and kindness in providing this prize. I intend to invest the funds provided into further studies in pursuit of my goal to work in conservation-based education – a goal that I hope Alisha, with her love for wildlife, would approve of."





# Keele Key Fund

Since its establishment, more than £426,000 has now supported over 160 projects which enhance the student and community experience at Keele – a sincere thank you to all who contribute to the fund each year. Here are some of the projects which received funding in 2025.



## The Poetry Busk

In line with Stoke-on-Trent's centenary celebrations in 2025, Key Funding enabled two 'Poetry Buses' at Newcastle-under-Lyme Library – the first to mark World Poetry Day in March, and the second as part of National Poetry Day in October.

At these events, four hours of rolling poetry were hosted by local poets and alumni, alongside offering work experience to a Creative Writing student who went on to forge the first Keele University UniSlam team (a festival bringing together emerging writers from universities across the UK and Ireland), and who won the UniSlam ambassador award 2025 in the process.

Lisa Blower, project lead and Reader in Creative Writing said "With over 110 people attending, and local press coverage, I am thrilled with the success of The Poetry Busk and with the ways in which it brought together the local poetry community with staff and students whilst enabling us to showcase our alumni who have gone on to have successful publishing careers.



"I am so grateful to the Keele Key Fund for enabling this project, especially in Stoke-on-Trent's centenary year, and as part of my 100 Books in 100 Years project that celebrates local authorship. It has reminded me how important events like this are for the local community whilst offering additional open mic opportunities for our student community to perform their work to a public audience."

Terry Heath, Senior Librarian at Newcastle-under-Lyme Library, said "We've had lots of requests for the buses to continue into 2026. There seems to be a real impetus around poetry at the moment which is reflected both in book sales and interest within our reading community. People are recognising the power of the word in helping them to manage their own health and wellbeing, so we were delighted to have the opportunity to host the buses."

Comments from attendees:

"It was amazing seeing people share their written arts [...] it inspires me to keep writing and pursuing my poetry hobby." (attendee and reader, 16-24)

"Love it, it makes me smile and want to write again." (attendee 65-75)



## Student garden

Healthcare students training at Keele's Clinical Education Centre (part of Royal Stoke University Hospital) are set to see the benefit of this initiative to create a welcoming outdoor space for both people and wildlife. Funding enabled essential groundwork to be completed on an unused outdoor area – enabling gardening equipment, seeds, bulbs, a bench, and a garden gate sign to be purchased. A forgotten path has been rediscovered and cleared, giving visitors safer and easier access, while the site itself is beginning to take shape with new planting areas.

Through the garden's creation, Keele students and hospital staff now have access to a relaxing environment where they can connect with nature, with pollinators and other wildlife also set to benefit. The project has also strengthened collaboration between library colleagues and hospital trust staff, fostering new working relationships.

Rachael Lewis, project lead and Librarian, said "I have found this to be a remarkably interesting and rewarding project. Special thanks go to alumni donors and colleagues whose support made this possible. I have learned a lot of new skills during this project including budgeting, making a bid, ordering, health and safety requirements and environmental issues."

In 2026, the site will come to life as the weather warms and be further developed to create suitable habitats for hedgehogs and frogs. An awareness campaign will encourage hospital-based students and staff to volunteer in the garden.



## Bouncing towards inclusivity

While bouncing on a trampoline is a great way to enjoy exercise, the difficulty of getting on and off the trampoline can be a barrier to participation for individuals with disabilities or mobility challenges. With Keele Key Funding, Keele University Trampolining Club were able to purchase foam stairs to enable members to access trampolines without assistance and will be in use for many Keele generations to come.

"Thanks to your generous support, we've been able to make our Club a more inclusive and empowering space for everyone. This has boosted confidence and helped everyone get the most out of training. By removing a key barrier to participation, we've been able to provide a safe, welcoming environment to more members, with our membership numbers growing by over 30% this year so far. We'd like to say a massive thank you for making this possible!"

Kate Goodman, President of Keele University Trampolining Club and student





# Alumni donations fund 'transformative' conference experience

The Keele Postgraduate Association Bursary (KPA Bursary) is funded through alumni donations, and any individual postgraduate student at Keele can apply for up to £500 to engage in activities outside of their course which will help their personal and academic development. Cameron Scully (Biomedical Science, Class of 2024 and current MPhil student) summarises how invaluable the funding he received in 2025 was.

“My name's Cam, and I'm an MPhil student in the Galizi Lab, part of the Centre for Entomology and Parasitology here at Keele.

My research focuses on engineering a novel transcriptional repression system in *Anopheles gambiae* – the mosquito that transmits malaria. Essentially, I'm working with a new form of CRISPR gene editing to skew the sex ratio of the mosquitoes, as only females can bite you and hence transmit malaria, which kills a child every minute. It's genetic engineering with the aim of reducing disease transmission – it is high-impact, and endlessly fascinating. And yes, it feels as sci-fi as it sounds.

Earlier this year, I was incredibly fortunate to receive just under £500 from the KPA Bursary to attend the European Society of Human Genetics conference in Milan, organised by a non-profit organisation which aims to ensure high standards in clinical practice across medical genetics. The KPA Bursary process was smooth and supportive from start to finish, and the fast reimbursement of expenses made a huge difference – especially as a student juggling a tight budget. It's the kind of practical, thoughtful support that really matters.

I was also supported by around £1,000 in funding from the (Bill and Melinda) Gates Foundation, who fund the lab's research.

The conference itself was overwhelming in the best way. It's the largest annual genetics conference in the world, with nearly 7,000 registrations from every corner of the field – academia, medicine and industry. But behind all that buzz was the real reason I was there – science at its most exciting.

I got to visit a stand showcasing the world's first CRISPR-based therapy – a child cured of a genetic disease using the very same Cas9 system we use in our lab. That moment brought home the real power of what we do in research. It's not just pipettes and Petri dishes – it's bench-to-bedside science. It's real people's lives being changed.

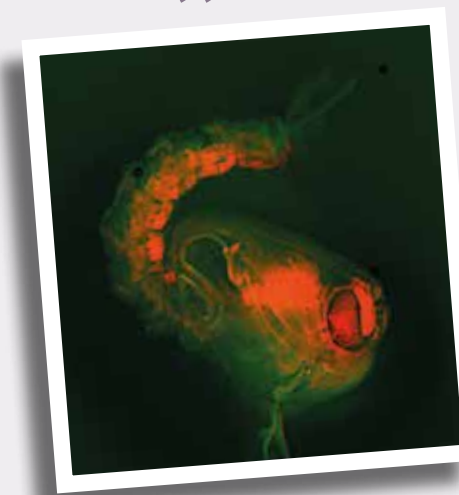
And then came one of the most powerful moments of the entire week, right at the end: hearing Katalin Karikó speak. She's the Nobel Laureate behind the development of mRNA vaccines – the science that made the COVID-19 vaccines possible. But her talk wasn't just about molecular biology. It was about persistence, failure, and resilience. In research – and in life – there are always setbacks. But hearing that from someone who has changed the world was deeply inspiring. That mindset – of resilience and persistence – is something I'll carry with me for a long time.

I wanted to use this conference not just to learn, but to network. And I really did. It gave me the chance to meet and build relationships with researchers, clinicians, entrepreneurs, and leaders – connections that will be invaluable as I move forward.

It's hard to summarise what this experience meant to me, but it was transformative, giving me access to insights and conversations you simply can't find in textbooks – unpublished, cutting-edge science being shared by the very people driving it. It was the ideal introduction to the field of human genetics that I want to specialise in in the future.

I started graduate-entry medicine in September this year, unfortunately not at Keele but Swansea, and am finishing off my MPhil research on the side, so I'll be bringing with me not just the science I learned at this conference, but the people I met, the stories I heard, and the inspiration I found.

I want to end by saying a heartfelt thank you, both to the KPA Bursary for making this experience possible, and to the Gates Foundation for their generous support with my flights and accommodation. To me this wasn't just a conference. It was a moment I won't forget and one that has shaped where I'm going next.”



A transgenic *Anopheles gambiae* pupa



**Gates Foundation**

# Mental Health Charter Project

Alumni gifts are helping fund work to implement improvements in mental health support at Keele. Elisha Worley, Mental Health Charter Project Manager, summarises work in 2025.

“At Keele, we believe that Mental Health and Wellbeing are foundations of building a thriving, compassionate and inclusive community, helping students succeed. Our commitment to the University Mental Health Charter reflects this belief whereby the framework is helping us to strengthen our whole university approach to Mental Health, ensuring that every student can thrive academically, socially, and personally within our diverse and inclusive community.

Over recent months, we have begun evaluating our current practices, drawing on Charter principles, best practices, and insights from past assessments across the sector, assembling a picture of where we are now and where we want to be. This work has already highlighted areas of strength, with Keele already having practices in place that have been highlighted as being excellent practice at other institutions by charter assessors.

A key strand of current work focuses on strengthening the student voice. We are in the process of enhancing student voice and participation plans for Mental Health and Wellbeing to ensure students are genuine partners in shaping our mental health approach, from giving feedback to co-creating and co-delivering campaigns and initiatives, which will support a more representative and collaborative culture. Alongside this, we have begun reviewing and developing mental health training for all staff across the university.

Over the past few months, significant work has also taken place in expanding our relationships with external organisations and community services. One significant development has been to strengthen our relationship with local NHS mental health partners, who are now offering onsite drop-in sessions alongside our own Counselling and Mental Health team.

This increased visibility and accessibility means students can access support earlier and more easily, reducing barriers and helping us create a more seamless pathway of care. Early discussions are already underway to explore how this collaboration could be expanded in the coming year. These partnerships lay the groundwork for a more proactive and connected support system, and they will continue to develop as the charter progresses.

Looking ahead, the next phase of the project will be to deepen our evidence gathering, broaden engagement across academic and professional services, and create a clear, ambitious, and achievable action plan. So far, there has been a strong sense of passion and commitment across Keele, whereby both staff and students have demonstrated genuine enthusiasm for being involved in the University Mental Health Charter work. This shared energy and willingness to collaborate reflect one of Keele's greatest strengths – a community that is deeply invested in supporting one another where everyone can belong and flourish.”

# Support for Postgraduate History at Keele

A generous philanthropic gift has been made in support of the History postgraduate research community. This welcomed contribution will be used to support postgraduate researchers in several meaningful ways.

The donation will award, through a competitive application process, one current first-year History PhD student's home fees for the remaining two years of their PhD programme. This opportunity will allow the recipient to focus on developing their skills and advancing their research without the burden of financial constraints.

In addition to this transformative scholarship, the donation will fund paid teaching opportunities for History postgraduate researchers (PGRs), helping them gain vital classroom experience. It will also establish a competitive research training fund to support travel and development and provide resources

for community-building activities such as field trips – strengthening the sense of belonging and collaboration among students. This part of the fund will also be open to current History postgraduate teaching students, encouraging transition to PhD.

Dr. Kristen Brill, Programme Director for History, shared her reflections on the impact of the gift:

*“This is an extraordinary opportunity for one student to develop their essential skills in the discipline.”*

*In addition, this donation will allow the History programme to better support all of our PGR students, including the establishment of a competitive research training fund, funded teaching opportunities, and community building events. The History programme is grateful for the generosity of the donor and their commitment to developing the next generation of historians.”*

This act of generosity not only transforms a student's academic journey, but it also strengthens the entire postgraduate community and celebrates the importance of historical research in understanding our world.





# Student telephone calls continue to make an impact

A team of 34 current students formed our annual telethon call team for 2025. There were nearly 800 conversations with alumni around the world over a three-week period in November and the comments we received after the calls are testament to how much alumni and students both valued this opportunity to learn from each other.

## Student callers reflected on their conversations with alumni:

*"Being a Student Caller has been such a surprisingly wholesome part of my time at Keele. I went into it thinking I'd just be making polite calls, but instead I somehow ended up laughing with alumni, getting mini life pep-talks, and collecting random bits of Keele history like Pokémon cards. Every person I spoke to made me feel genuinely supported, like a whole army of older, wiser versions of me were cheering me on through the phone. It was funny, grounding and honestly so comforting during a chaotic semester. By the end it felt less like a job and more like getting adopted by generations of Keele graduates who just want you to win!!"*

**Roa Alsaadi, first year Biomedical Science student**

*"I have enjoyed being a Student Caller because I have been able to speak to alumni from all different walks of life and I have gained a lot from listening to their wise words and stories. I have also enjoyed being part of such a motivated and fun team!"*

**Ellie Waters-Barnes, fifth year Medicine (Clinical Years) student**

*"I really enjoyed connecting and sharing Keele stories with a wide range of alumni that have worked across many fields, allowing me to gain inspirational career advice whilst fundraising for a great cause!"*

**Ben Oliver, second year Business Management student**

## The Together Fund

Money raised through the telethon this year will go to our newly launched Together Fund.

Our Together Fund supports a bold, inclusive and impactful vision for Keele's future – opening access to education, protecting our campus, and driving research that changes lives.

We've set out three priorities that define our ambitions for the coming years:

**1. An outstanding education for all**

We believe education should be accessible to everyone. With support, we can create inclusive, inspiring spaces and provide scholarships that remove barriers to success. From transforming learning environments to funding Sanctuary Scholarships and awards that recognise excellence, donor gift helps students thrive – no matter their background.

**2. Enhancing our beautiful campus**

Keele is home to one of the UK's most beautiful campuses – a space for learning, connection and wellbeing. To meet the needs of future generations, we must continue to invest in it. Donor support can help create a new Sports, Health and Wellbeing Centre, improve accessibility, and modernise our historic estate with sustainability at its core.

**3. Delivering research with impact**

Keele's research is transforming lives – from developing early cancer diagnostics to tackling climate change and global inequality. Gifts to the Together Fund help to support world-class researchers, funds vital equipment, and helps us create the spaces and collaborations needed for discoveries that have a real-world impact.

Our thanks for the campaign extends to the team who make this campaign possible – not least our Student Callers, who fit the calls in around their studies for three weeks, and our prize sponsors, who offer incentives to our callers throughout the campaign: Domino's Pizza, New Vic theatre, Keele Food & Drink, Keele Sport, Keele University Physiotherapy & Rehabilitation Clinic, Keele in Town (Keele's new presence in Newcastle-under-Lyme town centre), and the Keele Postgraduate Association Clubhouse.

Find out more about the Together Fund





together  
we will





With continued thanks for the regular support from all our scholarship and bursary donors, including;



The University operates as an educational charity and has the statutory status of an exempt charity (i.e. exempted from registration as a charity) by virtue of the Charities Act 2011 and Schedule 3. Our tax-exempt Inland Revenue charities reference number is X80032.

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T: 01782 732978  
E: [alumni.hq@keele.ac.uk](mailto:alumni.hq@keele.ac.uk)  
W: [keele.ac.uk/alumni](http://keele.ac.uk/alumni)

**f** foreverkeele  
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