An emotion-charged baton change, an A-list of medical researchers, and anti-government protestors: the opening had it all

Harry Perkins has arrived

By Lindy Brophy

The launch of the Harry Perkins Institute has signalled a new era in medical research.

The two men in the spotlight at the opening of the impressive $122 million building in the grounds of QEII were Professor Peter Klinken, the relinquishing director of the former Western Australian Institute for Medical Research (WAIMR), and his long-term friend and colleague, Winthrop Professor Peter Leedman, the director-designate of the newly-branded institute.

But as Richard Walley, in his welcome to country, called on the good spirit to guide and look after everybody at the opening ceremony, it was clear the spirits of two other men were very obviously hovering just outside that spotlight.

They were Harry Perkins himself, the former Chairman of Wesfarmers, who made what was, two decades ago, the biggest donation to medical research in Australia to establish WAIMR, and Dr Rex Joyner, former CEO of Royal Perth Hospital, who first suggested to the two young colleagues that they should set up a medical research institute.

“I hope Rex and Harry are looking down on us today and saying that those two young blokes have done alright!” said Professor Klinken. 

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The Perkins, as it already known by us Australians who love to shorten a title, brings together the biggest critical mass of medical researchers ever assembled in WA. There are already 500 scientific investigators in the new building, with another 200 soon to join them.

“Big is beautiful,” said Professor Leedman. “We can now foster new and exciting collaborations all over the world. We need to be bold to make a difference in tackling heart disease, cancer and diabetes, the diseases that are taking our loved ones from us.”

About 400 people gathered in the forecourt of the big blue-branded building, joined by about 30 anti-Government protestors, who kept up their chants against the Abbot government’s policies on asylum seekers and the environment as the Prime Minister took to the podium to officially open the Institute.

Tony Abbott largely ignored the protestors as he told the guests that he was “confident that our world will be better in years to come because of the work being done in the building behind us.”

Mr Abbott was the health minister in the Howard government when it was asked 20 years ago for support to establish WAIMR. The Federal Government is, once again, a partner of the Perkins, along with the State Government, UWA and the Lions Eye Institute.

Supporters include LotteryWest, the McCusker Charitable Foundation and the Stan Perron Charitable Foundation.

Chairman of the Perkins board, Larry Iffla, recognised the years of hard work that had gone into designing, building and delivering a superb 10-level light-filled collaborative centre.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Johnson, put into words the simple but vital aim of the institute: “To make a difference to the lives of people in WA and elsewhere in the world.”

Winthrop Professor David Mackay, Managing Director of the Lions Eye Institute (LEI), which is also now housed in the new building, said his researchers would continue to deliver translational research to that end.

“Age-related macular degeneration has already been significantly reduced thanks to translation of LEI research,” he said. “And we have recently discovered genes that are pre-disposed to glaucoma.”

The Prime Minister, Professor Mackay, the State Health Minister Kim Hames and the Vice-Chancellor were all presented with ceremonial keys to the building, but the loudest and longest applause was reserved for the presentation of the final key to Professor Leedman by Professor Klinken.

As Professor Klinken rose to make the final speech of his career as director of WAIMR, the protestors began chanting again.

“Excuse me, I’m talking,” he said, holding up his hand. “This is all about me, this is my last speech, this is my last day … my last one minute and 30 seconds in fact!”

Perhaps the protestors appreciated being acknowledged. They were quiet for the rest of his speech.

“It gives me huge pleasure – huge pleasure – to hand over the keys to the Harry Perkins Institute to my friend and colleague Peter Leedman.”

After an emotional embrace, Professor Leedman leapt onto the stage saying: “I feel as though I’ve just been given the best job in the world.”

Joining Professor Mackay in illustrating the great work that is already happening at Perkins, he gave the guests the final good news of the day: a brief outline of how technology is helping to advance medical science.

“Scanning your bowel is now possible with a very tiny camera that you swallow, which could soon mean an end to colonoscopy – and you will all feel happy about that!” he said.

“With technology, we can take medical research to the next level. And we invite you all to join us on this journey.”
Craig Pennell had more than 20 bones broken when he was hit by a car while cycling last October.

The first thing he did from his hospital bed, when was out of the high dependency unit, was to start a lobby group, Cycle Safe WA.

Associate Professor Pennell, from the School of Women’s and Infants’ Health, is appalled at how dangerous it is for cyclists on Perth roads.

He rides in an elite Masters team, recently representing Australia in the Masters World Championships in Italy. “I’m serious about making the roads safer for all the 400,00 people who cycle in Perth every week, not just the lycra-clad brigade, but the commuters and the kids as well,” he said.

“I am one of a group of 50 who train under the same coach, and three of us were hit by cars last year. We are experienced cyclists who don’t put ourselves at risk but I have been hit by cars three times.”

Cycle Safe WA’s first aim is to get enacted a road law about leaving space between a car and a bike. “Western Australia has this law on its books, but it is not enforced and we are working with politicians for systemic change, starting with enforcing a one or 1.5 metre distance between cars and bikes on the road,” he said.

Professor Pennell said he was working with Police Minister Liza Harvey and that MLC Donna Faragher was very supportive, as was the RAC.

He and his group are aiming for 6,000 signatures on a petition to the State Upper House to put the law into practice.

His elite cycling group is trialling a miniature camera, installed in a bicycle’s tail light, so drivers who act aggressively towards cyclists can be recorded. “On the first morning we tried them, two drivers tried to run some of the cyclists off the road, and were caught on film.”

He said Monash University’s bicycle injury research group had found that in 90 per cent of car vs bike accidents, the driver was solely at fault and it was almost always because the driver had not seen the cyclist.

“In only 10 per cent of car vs bike collisions, it is the cyclist’s fault, and it’s usually because of stupid careless cyclists riding without lights at night or going through red lights.

“Every bad driver, there are cyclists who are not doing the right thing. This campaign is not about blame, it’s about shared roads and shared responsibility.”

Cycle Safe WA is also hoping to develop a smart phone app to make it easier for cyclists to report accidents. “Most cyclists don’t report accidents, so we don’t have good accident data. We are working with Bicycling Western Australia on this. Comprehensive data from cyclists would help local councils to identify black spots and do something to improve them.”

Professor Pennell said cycling in Europe was a joy. “You always feel safe, outside of the big cities,” he said. “There are always dedicated bike and taxi lanes and drivers respect you and give you space.

“When they beep their horns, it is to let you know that they are passing … not to tell you to get off the road!”

To sign the petition and to read more about cycling safety in Perth, go to cyclesafewa.com.au/petition/
It is with great pleasure that I welcome our new Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Dawn Freshwater to the University. Dawn joined us at the start of the month and will be responsible for leading organisational change and academic planning and performance.

Her arrival comes at an important time in the University’s future direction as we get set to embark on a series of functional reviews, further enhance our teaching and learning credentials, and embrace new opportunities that will come our way.

Professor Freshwater joins us after holding the position of Pro Vice-Chancellor for Organisational Effectiveness at the University of Leeds.

Dawn is a distinguished, internationally recognised researcher in mental health, with a significant international track record. I am sure you will join me in making Dawn welcome.

I am also pleased to let you know about the launch of a new community awareness campaign by one of our national peak bodies, Universities Australia.

The “Keep it Clever” campaign is designed to trigger a national conversation about the role of university education and research in creating the economy of the future.

UWA is pleased to be supporting this campaign to help build awareness of why a strong higher education sector is essential to Australia’s future prosperity.

You can learn more about the campaign, and how you can get involved, by visiting keepitclever.com.au

The launch of the campaign coincided with a meeting I had with the Federal Minister for Education, Christopher Pyne, in Perth last week.

It was a productive conversation and the Minister was particularly interested in our plans to enhance our engagement with industry and the community, our efforts to work smarter and more efficiently through our functional reviews and in what we think is the future of higher education in Australia.

The meeting was also timely ahead of next month’s Federal Budget and the release of the Government’s Commission of Audit – both of which could deliver further change to the sector.

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University Archivist Maria Carvalho wrote: “Curiosity led me to carry out a quick search and, while I cannot answer your question with certainty, I have discovered that there does not seem to have been a student with the first name Harrold but there was one with the surname Harrold who attended University in that time period. Although he was not an Engineering student it is possible that he still took part in the student efforts to complete the Reflection Pond in time for the official opening.

“John Gwynn Harrold studied Medicine, enrolling in 1931, and attending UWA until 1933.

“But he did not graduate, which is possibly why Development and Alumni Relations does not have him on their database. We in Archives have early student files on microfilm that include all students who enrolled at UWA even if they have not graduated.

“This does not conclusively solve the mystery for you but seems to indicate the possibility that John Gwynn Harold was the one who wrote his name on the bottom of the pond.”

Honorary Fellow in Physics Lance Maschmedt and his former colleague, John Budge, who is now retired, mused on the possibilities when they got together recently.

“Budgie thinks the carving could have been done by Harrold Sage, who was a painter in Property Services (a forerunner of Campus Management),” Lance said.

“It wouldn’t have been as far back as the 1930s. Budgie wouldn’t have started here until the 1940s. But both he and I can remember the pond being drained for maintenance and we think the painters may have been involved in any cleaning and repair programs. Budgie described Harrold Sage as a ‘real larrikin – just the sort of bloke who would carve his name at the bottom of the pond if he got the chance’.”
Much as he loves the micro level of medical research, John Challis came to the realisation many years ago, that the macro level – the translation of that research – is even more exciting.

“We researchers are in an extremely privileged position, spending money from the public purse, so it is our responsibility to give back to the community,” said Winthrop Professor Challis, the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Health and Medical Research).

In his new position, he is charged with another responsibility: to design and implement strategies to ensure that UWA receives the funding to enable that research.

In recent years, UWA’s and indeed Western Australia’s share of medical research funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) – ‘the gold standard’, as Professor Challis put it – has declined.

“My job, over the next two years, is to reverse that decline and, with the guidance of the Vice-Chancellor and the help of the DVC (Research) Robyn Owens, I aim to build partnerships with other universities and governments and to bring together research institutions that are associated with UWA to achieve greater critical mass, to encourage NHMRC and other funding,” he said.

His research field is pre-term births and he has collaborated with Winthrop Professor John Newnham for several years. Professor Challis worked at the Nuffield Institute for Medical Research in Oxford where he began to take an interest in the strategic side of medical research before becoming the inaugural scientific director of a new medical research institute in London, Ontario.

“I worked in St Joseph’s Hospital, renowned for its holistic care, but lagging behind in research.” Over 12 years, he increased their research output enormously and was recruited by the University of Toronto to the Chair of the famous Department of Physiology, where the discovery of insulin in 1921 led to a Nobel Prize.

“We grew the department by 25 faculty appointments in three years by building bridges between the university and hospital-based research institutions: similar to what we had done in London at St Joseph’s, but in the reverse direction,” he said.

Professor Challis was in demand. He became one of the inaugural scientific directors of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. “Formation of CIHR was transformational and changed the focus from medical research to outcomes and better health research. It was as much about translation into better community health and policy as publishing academic papers,” he said. In this position, Professor Challis helped to design research questions that were important to the community.

He then returned to the University of Toronto as its Vice President Research and Associate Provost. He describes it as “an unbelievable job, with responsibility across the entirety of this THEs top 20 University and an annual research budget approaching $1 billion.”

After five years in what was probably his favourite job, Professor Challis was asked to join the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research in Vancouver. Michael Smith was another Nobel Laureate, in Chemistry.

“This foundation was set up in response to exactly the same circumstances as we see in WA now – a decline in funding for medical research,” he said.

“I hope to bring to bear here my experience at the Michael Smith.

“We need to define who we are in terms of health and medical research. What are our major strengths and what are those areas in which UWA stands tall in Australia and in the world today and what are our opportunities to stand tall in another three to five years?”

Professor Challis commended Professor Owens’ ‘near miss’ funding for researchers who don’t get NHMRC funding but who have submitted their applications for internal peer review.

“She has also instituted the funding to bridge the salary gap difference between a NHMRC personal award and a researcher’s University salary.

“That allows us to say to top researchers: ‘Bring your NHMRC funding here and we’ll make up the difference.’ It’s a remarkable offer and one that about 34 medical researchers and more than 50 in other disciplines are already enjoying.”

He wants to build on the Michael Smith model which created a supportive and collaborative environment with the government.

“Too often in health, we go to the government and say: ‘Give us money and we’ll do great things.’ We have to turn that around and say: ‘What do you need, how can we help the community and use this funding?’”
About one in 12 babies in Australia is born prematurely and WA has the best record in the country for keeping these babies alive and ensuring quality of life.

As it is only over the past 30 years that very preterm babies have survived in great numbers, there has been little research on the effects of very preterm birth on the health of mature adults.

Preterm babies may grow up with a high risk of ill health, including metabolic syndrome: increased risk of high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease and central adiposity (excess abdominal fat associated with cardiovascular risk). They may contribute a burden on health care services depending on the extent of physical, financial, social and psychological hardship.

A group of UWA researchers has won an NHMRC grant to establish a Centre of Research Excellence to improve the immediate and longer-term health outcomes of preterm infants and to try to improve the lives of this most vulnerable and fragile population.

It is one of only six Centres of Research Excellence (CRE) for clinical research funded by the NHMRC last year.

Led by Jane Pillow, Professor in the School of Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology, and Karen Simmer, Winthrop Professor of Newborn Medicine in the School of Paediatrics and Child Health (SPACH), the new centre has investigators from five states.

Professors Pillow and Simmer are both clinical neonatologists and co-directors of the UWA Centre for Neonatal Research and Education.

The new CRE is built on the premise that the short and long-term health outcomes of preterm babies can be improved by the care they are given in the first weeks of their lives, and by not concentrating on individual systems but by working together and considering the holistic needs of the infant.

The lead investigators give three reasons they think contributed to a successful application: the researchers involved are already working together to assess and treat preterm infants in a holistic way, combining the results of research on the heart, lungs, gastrointestinal tract, immunity, infection and brain development; the group already has a good track record for translating its research, implementing it in such projects as the human milk bank and probiotic therapy, which they started and which has now spread around the world; and their innovative strategies for developing early career researchers in multidisciplinary teams.

Their work spans the pre-clinical, clinical and translational phases of research. Professor Pillow explains: “Our work in the pre-clinical setting involves work with preterm lambs, pigs and newborn mice.
When we are developing brand new therapies, we need to make sure they are safe, so we trial the new treatments in preclinical models.

“Once we know they are safe, the therapies are evaluated in the human population via clinical trials. Then, if clinical trials are successful, move to translation and clinical implementation phases, to ensure that the research improves health outcomes. If we have unexpected results from clinical trials, we return to the pre-clinical setting to further refine the therapy. Our research is a continual review.”

In addition to the $2.5 million CRE grant, Professor Pillow was successful in obtaining a $1.7 million NHMRC project grant for her preclinical research studies. The project will break new ground in Australia by keeping preterm lambs ventilated for several weeks, and then weaning them off the mechanical ventilator and continuing to monitor them to examine long-term outcomes of new and controversial treatments. The study will focus on cardiorespiratory and neurodevelopmental outcomes, but collaborators will also assess the effect of the treatments on the development of other body organs and systems.

“The CRE will allow us to build value-adding studies onto this research,” Professor Pillow said. “We built support for the new preclinical facility into the CRE application because we felt that this preclinical work would form an important part of the translational research cycle.”

Professor Simmer gave examples of some of the centre’s projects.

“Preterm babies need ventilation to help them breathe and we will be looking at gentler ways of delivering these mechanical breaths, and how we can lessen the chances of lung disease in later life. Tim Moss is doing some work in this area introducing stem cells into damaged lungs,” she said.

“We are testing different types of nutrition for preterm babies, using both intravenous feeding and expressed breast milk, looking at giving them more and better quality protein. We are also working on the type of lipid (fat) that we give them for better brain development, including giving the mother a therapy that will change the fat content of her breast milk.

“We will be furthering our study of probiotics to help develop the baby’s gastrointestinal system and looking at improving the infant’s immune system and inflammatory response so we can reduce the mortality and morbidity associated with infections.”

She said that, 30 years ago, it was all about survival for preterm babies.

“In the 1980s, we used to concentrate on just stopping them dying from lung disease. Now most preterm babies survive as their management in the neonatal ICU continues to improve.

“But we just don’t know yet how many get long-term complications and what those long-term complications will be.”

About 2,700 preterm babies are born or cared for at King Edward Memorial Hospital every year, so the centre has a ready-made study group.

They already follow babies born before 33 weeks gestation, until they are a year old, and those born earlier, until they are school age. There is also a group of adults in their early 20s which was established as a preterm cohort around the same time as the Raine Study, and the CRE will include them in their longer-term studies.
Twenty years ago, Tim St Pierre and his colleagues were known as ‘those weird scientists who study magnetism in medicine’.

Now the global Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers not only recognises Professor St Pierre but is feting him this year as their Magnetics Society’s Distinguished Lecturer for 2014.

Professor St Pierre heads UWA’s BioMagnetics Research Group in the School of Physics which for more than 10 years has been making a real difference to medical procedures all over the world.

The clinicians who have used his techniques now have the chance to meet the man who revolutionised liver investigations and is now working on simple low cost diagnostics for the two biggest tropical diseases, malaria and schistosomiasis or Bilharzia.

He is currently in Asia, on the first of three extensive lecture tours which will take him across the globe to deliver 50 lectures in four continents over nearly six months. He is talking to physicists, engineers and medical practitioners in Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, the People’s Republic of China and Taiwan.

In May he will do the lecture circuit in Europe, visiting Spain, Austria, Germany, Switzerland and the UK, and taking in Singapore on the way back to Perth.

From August he is touring North and South America, starting in Brazil, where he has collaborators, and working his way across the United States for 10 weeks.

“Traditionally magnetics materials scientists have focused on technological applications of magnetism in devices such as computers and electric motors,” Professor St Pierre said.

“Geophysicists have been interested in magnetism in rocks. But we are moving into a new era where we are able to detect very subtle changes in the magnetic properties of living systems and design magnetic technologies to help us diagnose and treat disease.”

He started with devising an alternative to an invasive, expensive, often painful and even occasionally fatal liver biopsy for doctors to tell how much iron is in a human liver.

“This is a necessary test for diseases such as haemochromotosis and sickle cell anaemia,” he said. “We came up
with a technology that piggy-backs onto magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) because most major hospitals in the world have MRI and can easily adapt their machines to measure liver iron concentration.”

His invention has been used world-wide since 2006, with more than 20,000 tests completed. All those tests are sent back to Professor St Pierre’s public company Ferriscan, which analyses the data.

“Nobody uses a biopsy for an iron investigation any more,” he said.

With colleague Associate Professor Mike House he is working on a simple and cheap diagnostic tool for malaria.

“Malaria can be cured by drugs but the parasite can lie dormant in the patient until he or she is bitten by another mosquito, which will then spread the disease. We have developed a magnetic device to detect an infectious form of malaria parasites in a fingerprick blood test,” he said. “I’m pretty proud of this development.”

They are also working on a magnetic device to help diagnose schistosomiasis or Bilharzia, another parasitic disease that is second only to malaria in terms of its global impact.

A parasitic worm is spread by its host, a freshwater snail, in tropical regions, particularly where access to clean water and sanitation is poor. The snail enters the bloodstream and its eggs then burrow into tissue, including the liver and intestine.

“It’s an insidious disease. It can take years after the parasite has entered the body for it to develop. It can be treated with drugs, but a diagnostic tool is needed as there are no symptoms until it is too late.

“As the disease is prevalent in Africa and Asia, it has to be a low-cost option, which we can provide with magnetics technology.”

He is working on this project with colleagues in Queensland and Brazil.

Professor St Pierre’s research is supported by NHMRC, ARC and a UWA-UQ Bilateral Research Collaboration Award.

One of our experts on heart disease is the first external faculty member of the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute.

ARC Future Fellow Professor Livia Hool in the School of Anatomy, Physiology and Human Biology, has been appointed the prestigious Institute’s first Faculty-at-Large.

“My appointment is to enhance collaboration between the Institute and research academics in WA,” said Professor Hool, whose work in the field of cardiac electrophysiology looks at various mechanisms that lead to heart failure.

It is not the first time she has brought valuable connections to UWA. When Professor Hool, originally from Sydney, was awarded a NHMRC Peter Doherty Fellowship for early career researchers soon after completing a post-doctoral position at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, she decided to bring her funding to UWA in 1998 where she had the opportunity of setting up her own laboratory.

She is still an employee of UWA but the new position means that her research can be enriched by her colleagues and the extensive resources of the Victor Chang and that, conversely, her expertise and that of her UWA colleagues is more readily available to the researchers at the institute.

“When I returned to Sydney from my postdoc, I worked for six months at the Victor Chang, before deciding to come to UWA,” Professor Hool said. “And Professor Robert Graham, who was appointed the first Executive Director of the Institute in 1994, had also worked at the Cleveland Clinic, which is associated with Case Western Reserve University. So I already had a small connection.

“Several years ago, I invited Professor Graham to UWA and we have kept in touch. Recently he contacted me because he was keen to develop a more formal link with the University.”

The Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute is the premier organisation in Australia for studying heart disease. It was established in 1994, in honour of brilliant cardiac surgeon and researcher Victor Chang who pioneered the heart transplant program at Sydney’s St Vincent’s Hospital.

Dr Chang was gunned down in the street in 1991, at the age of 54, in a failed extortion attempt against him.

Already, one of Professor Hool’s PhD scholars, Padmapriya Muralidharan, is involved in a collaboration with the Institute in her research into the effects of oxidative stress on the L-type calcium channel in the heart.

The Faculty-at-Large position is for five years, with an option to renew it.
Angela Rossen is combining her skill as an artist and her love of snorkeling to excite children about science.

The Oceans Institute Artist in Residence Seagrass Project brings art to science and science to schools through artworks and biodiversity workshops in primary schools.

“Seagrass is a vital resource which not only provides a nursery and food to many marine species but also filters seawater, stabilises the near shore sand, produces more oxygen per square metre than terrestrial forests and acts as a carbon sink. It is undervalued by most because of a lack of understanding. If you go for a snorkel you will be amazed at what you can find on the reefs and in the seagrass meadows. Go slowly and look carefully.”

The project is a collaboration with Emeritus Winthrop Professor Di Walker whose extensive work in the area of seagrass is highly regarded. The School of Plant Biology is a major contributor in Australia to the study of seagrass ecology, management and revegetation. Angela and Professor Walker are collaborating on a book documenting the life of Western Australian seagrass meadows.

Working with other researchers at the Oceans Institute, Angela joins field trips, which she documents, and attends seminars, to inform her work. Some of her paintings are based on particular research projects. “It is great working with scientists because they
are extremely focused and always passionate about what they do,” she said.

As part of the residency, Angela conducts workshops with teachers in schools and pre-service teachers at the Graduate School of Education. The teachers learn that biological sciences can be a vehicle for engagement across different learning areas. “Observing and recording can be done through different art media which are a lot of fun and a great way to teach and for children to learn,” she said.

Angela also presents Environmental Science Art Workshops in schools involving children in biodiversity and conservation.

“Children are visual learners and really enjoy making observations and field sketches on the beach. My drawing lessons simply encourage their natural inclination to discover.”

The children first draw in the field and then, building on the field work, draw in the classroom with reference to local field guides. They work collaboratively to create a large painting that is a careful survey of the biodiversity from the site of the field trip. Angela paints the background and the children add the living things.

“These paintings are not only a thing of great pride for all who take part, but remain at the school as a learning tool for the wider school community,” Angela said.

Discussion about how scientists gather information by careful observation and how that data informs good decision-making is an important part of the workshops.

Angela also talks with the school groups about research at the Oceans Institute. She is helping volunteer OI postgraduate students to connect with school groups.

“Young scientists can bring the scientific method to life for children and show them that science is not only an exciting thing to do but also very necessary,” she said. “Now more than ever the natural world needs champions.

“It is important to allow children leisurely exploration and discovery of the natural world. We must show children the beauty, diversity and fragility of nature so that they will love it for its own sake, want to conserve it and want to learn its secrets for themselves.”

More of the school workshops and Angela’s studio work can be seen on her website at angelarossen.com or contact info@angelarossen.com
With the Co-op bookshop, the Oak Lawn and Rocket Fuel coffee gathered around the Guild Village, students now have almost everything they need in one place.

This time next year, their final needs will be met.

The new Student Services Precinct is a $6 million revamp and regrouping of many services the University provides for students, in one place.

From early next year, the Precinct will bring together Student Support Services, Student Administration, the Admissions Centre and the International Centre.

“This area, with the Guild Village on one side and the Oak Lawn on the other, is where all the students congregate – thousands of them every day,” said Jon Stubbs, Director of Student Services, and the man behind the grand plan. “So it makes sense to bring the services here rather than having them scattered across the campus.”

His dream of a one stop shop for all student services on the Crawley campus was cut short by the global financial crisis in 2008.

Instead of the $20 million plan for all services to be in one place and served by smart technology, with offices and service areas linked by roofed courtyards for the comfort of students, the redevelopment was scaled down.

It leaves the Graduate Research and Scholarships office at the north end of the campus and the Centre for English Language Teaching on the Nedlands campus.

But the current building program in and around the social sciences buildings will still result in a much better outcome for students and much better working conditions for staff.

Although the courtyards between and within the buildings will not be roofed, they will be on the same level as the internal spaces, providing good access for students with disabilities or those wheeling prams, and creating a pleasant and welcoming flow from one area to another.

The other three departments are currently in Hackett Hall, all of them crowded as staff numbers have outgrown accommodation. Their move further south to the new centre will also help to relieve crowded conditions in Graduate Research and Scholarships, also in Hackett Hall.

The medical centre, in the Guild Village, has been refurbished and is close enough to provide a convenient link to other student services.

Mr Stubbs hopes eventually to include smart technology in the Precinct.

“Students do like face to face contact with staff, but they don’t want to stand in a queue waiting for that contact. They want to be able to go to the bookshop or get a coffee and know they won’t lose their place in the queue, because the system will send a message to their phones when their turn is coming up.

“Or if they do choose to wait in a queue, we would like to be able to inform and entertain them with digital content on screens that can keep them updated with news services, information about university courses and services, with a running tape telling them where they are in the queue.

“Students also want to be sure that when they reach the head of the queue, they will be talking to somebody who can help them. A self-serve digital system which asks a few questions of students before they join a queue would help enormously.

“Such a system would also benefit the institution: we would know how many people had come to the Precinct, how long they had to wait, if we had the resources to help them, and whether they were satisfied in just one visit.”

While UWA will have to wait for these technologies, the staff in the Precinct will be trained and ‘user-friendly’ to make the students’ experiences as good as possible.

Building is expected to be complete by December. With the services to be housed there typically very busy over December and January with enrolments, the occupation will be staged over the early part of 2015.

The paperbark trees in the internal Social Sciences courtyard were removed to allow the courtyard to be used for a wider range of activities. One tree has also been removed from the southern courtyard so the ground level can be raised to ensure smooth access between sections.
If you ask Michael McPhail what sort of person he is, he is likely to tell you that he enjoys cliff-jumping.

The 20-year-old Honours student isn’t talking about an adventurous pastime; rather his approach to life and his love of new challenges.

Michael is the youngest local government councillor in Western Australia, and probably in Australia.

After being elected last year, the Urban Planning student decided to do his Honours year part-time, over two years, so he could devote enough time to his role as a councillor in the Town of East Fremantle.

“I’ve always been driven to test myself in the leadership sense,” Michael said. “I did think about getting involved in leadership in the student Guild, but decided that I could make a bigger impact outside the campus.”

His two roles, urban planner and local councillor, fit together perfectly.

“Being on council is a great opportunity to get a different perspective of urban planning, from housing and the nitty gritty details to strategic policy,” he said.
James McCarthy-Price is setting up an academic support program for Indigenous high school students, preparing for a semester of study abroad in Italy – and still had time to represent WA at the National Windsurfing Wave Championships.

James (26), an Environmental Engineering student who has a UWA Sports Development Scholarship, is the top-ranked Australian Freestyle windsurfer and recently placed third in the Australian Wave Sailing discipline at Phillip Island last month.

“He hopes to compete in the Australian Freestyle windsurfing championships before going to the University of Bologna to continue his Masters of Professional Engineering.

“At the moment I’m busy building a start-up for IndGenius,” said James, who is Vice-President of EnactusUWA, a global initiative of university students who develop social enterprises to improve quality of life and living standards locally and internationally.

“We are building a program that will provide tailored academic support for Indigenous kids through a core of talented, passionate and culturally aware tutors. We’re piloting our program with Balga High School with the goal to build a platform that could be used to help kids across the state.”

James grew up in Esperance where he loved to surf. “We have great waves and the beaches are uncrowded,” he said. “But in Perth, the waves are pretty average and really crowded, so I took up windsurfing, which I can do on the uncrowded river.”

James is excited about his exchange in Bologna but is preparing to compete in both the Australian Freestyle National Titles and the Enactus National Competition in June before heading to Italy in September.

He thanked his windsurfing sponsors Severne Sails, Starboard, KineticIT and Windsurfing Western Australia. His sports scholarship is also a great help.

For more information about EnactusUWA, please visit the website: enactusuwa.org
In the water or in the hospital – these sisters are caring for others’ lives

Gloria and Jacqueline are Master of Nursing Science students who, in their spare time, are volunteer Surf Life Savers. They are part of a four-woman all-UWA team which won Gold, Silver and Bronze at the recent State Surf Life Saving Championships at Scarborough Beach.

Student cricketers break drought

For the first time in six years, the students have beaten the staff at cricket.

The Guild President’s XI beat the Vice-Chancellor’s XI with just 1.5 overs to go in a closely-fought contest.

Staff captain Jack Bryant (who, when he’s not wearing whites, is a senior systems administrator in Information Services) said the students enlisted the services of some of the University Cricket Club’s First XI players including Western Warrior Wil Bosisto.

“We were full of confidence after Matt Huitson (IT Manager, Science) and Mark Henderson (Senior Technician, Engineering) combined to dismiss the young Western Warrior Wil for just five runs. But we were unable to remove their mainstay, Robin Broom, who scored 35 not out in quick time and took the game away from the VC’s XI,” Jack said.

The staff made 119 runs.

In the true spirit of the game, David Rogers (Employment Relations and Management Services) said it was good to see the students get up for a win after the staff had won the past five annual matches.

The other team members are Leah Elliott who is studying town planning and Sally Ledger, studying marine biology.

“It’s great to see the Student Guild getting behind the match and organising the logistics,” he said. “James Oval was prepared magnificently and we couldn’t have asked for better conditions.

“Thanks to Sport and Recreation for supplying the gear.”

As well as winning the trophy, the students provided some unscheduled entertainment during the afternoon with five male streakers taking to the field to promote PROSH.
Growing older?

Just keep paddling...

Many hundreds of students – and their parents – have discovered the joys of paddling a kayak in Matilda Bay.

And for most of them, Colin Thorpe is the man who made it possible.

Colin, a UWA graduate, ran the Recreate paddling program for the UWA Sport and Recreation Association from the Watersports and Leadership complex for several years. Then, after retiring a year ago, he immediately returned to the water as a volunteer.

He took up paddling at the age of 42.

“My son got into it and, as I had to drive him to the rapids, I thought I might as well join in,” he said. He went on to complete 11 Avon Descents and, after the first few, started training paddlers for the event.

Colin’s introduction to the Avon Descent was run by Bruce Meakins, Director of UWA Sports. Several years later, Bruce asked Colin to write the strategic plan for paddling for the new Watersports complex and to lead the paddling programs for students and the community.

One of his great successes has been the GOLD (Growing Old Living Dangerously) program for over-50s.

“It caters for people who probably have not paddled before, who want to share the pleasures of paddling and experience the joys of being at one with nature on the water, all in a pleasant social environment,” Colin said. “New members often have quite a range of physical abilities which are catered for by paddling in four different groups.”

Currently, about 30 people spend a happy afternoon together, starting with a flexibility session run by physiotherapist Gillian Henderson, followed by lunch, an hour-and-half paddling on the river, then afternoon tea. Once in every seven-week course, the paddlers travel further afield and paddle in another part of the river.

Gillian, wife of Australian Laureate Fellow Richard Hobbs, became hooked on paddling after trying it out at a Have A Go day, run by the GOLD group. Her flexibility session for older people before taking to the water has become a significant feature of the program.

“We have people in this program who have had total hip and total knee replacements, open heart and spinal surgery, and peripheral neuropathy but, together with Colin, we show them that they all have the ability to improve and enjoy new experiences,” Gillian said.

Colin added a leadership program to the GOLD classes, to train new instructors, which will ensure the groups will continue even when he’s had enough.

But that is not likely to be any time soon.

“We have such a wonderful time, everybody learns new skills and we enjoy our beautiful river. Who wouldn’t want to keep doing that?” he asked.

To find out more about Recreate courses at UWA, go to: sports.uwa.edu.au/recreate-courses
Get moving for a long and healthy life

“Being sedentary is about as bad for you as smoking.”

America’s most famous cancer specialist, Dr David Agus, recently included this declaration in his list of ten rules for living longer.

It’s a frightening prospect for people who think they are healthy because they don’t smoke. That includes many of us at universities, who sit for hours in front of computers.

Dr Agus himself spends part of each day at a standing desk and doing his emails while walking slowly on a treadmill.

UWA staff keen to motivate themselves to move more might consider joining this year’s Global Corporate Challenge (GCC).

It starts next month, but now is the time to challenge yourself to form a team and commit to taking at least 10,000 steps a day as recommended for good health. The Challenge has helped staff to increase their activity levels, and also to lose weight, improve their eating habits and feel less stressed.

Sarina Hilton, UWA’s Wellbeing Officer, said the GCC was a great way to keep motivated to exercise as the days get cooler, especially given the team approach.

“I’ve heard some great stories of team members supporting each other – whether that’s by walking together or just sharing tips of how to get their step counts up,” she said. “The fact that we have such a lovely setting to walk in on campus is another real plus.”

If staff join a UWA team for GCC 2014, the University will pick up half the registration cost, bringing it down to just $49 per person.

To find out more, visit safety.uwa.edu.au/wellbeing or contact Sarina on 6488 7931 or via email at wellbeing@uwa.edu.au

The Challenge begins on May 28 and continues through to September 4.

(Some of David Agus’ other tips for a long and healthy life are: smile, drink coffee and red wine [both in moderation], don’t wear high heels, wash your hands frequently, exercise enough to raise a sweat and get your heart pumping for at least 15 minutes a day, and eat oily fish such as salmon, tuna and sardines.)

The kindness of a stranger supports European students

In the mid-1990s, an Englishman called Gerald Frank Brown was a frequent visitor to Australia House in London.

WA’s Agent General at the time, former Liberal MP Bill Hassell said the staff never knew what Mr Brown was researching. All they knew was that he was an investor in the mining industry in WA.

When the mysterious visitor died he left £80,000 to the Government of Western Australia. “We still don’t know any more about him or why he chose to leave his money to the State,” said Mr Hassell at the presentation of scholarships in Mr Brown’s name.

Mr Hassell recommended to the then Premier, Richard Court, that the money not be put into consolidated revenue but invested to fund scholarships for students from the European Economic Union to help them study in WA.

The Gerald Frank Brown Memorial Scholarship was established and the funds have grown so that this year, for the first time, four scholarships were presented, two of them going to UWA students.

Loek Janssen from Vrije University in the Netherlands and Gonzalo Smith Morrondo from Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Spain are both on student exchange. They were each awarded $2,000 which they can spend as they wish.

Gonzalo, who is studying finance, has already visited Shark Bay during his year here and hopes to see the south-west, but rather than spending it all on travel, said he would probably send some money to his mother in Spain who has been helping to support him at UWA.

Loek is studying computational engineering and has just been accepted to do his masters at Stanford.

The Gerald Frank Brown Memorial Scholarship is administered through the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Welcoming Loek and Gonzalo and the two winners from Curtin and Murdoch universities, the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Winthrop Professor Alec Cameron, said exchange students usually “take back some love” for Australia when they leave.

“This is called soft diplomacy. It’s a great way for people to get a better understanding of Australia, its people and their aspirations,” he said.
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Good riddance to bad breath.

Applications for the inaugural CISWA Awards are now open:

CISWA International Student of the Year Award
Recognises the significant contribution that international students make to the Western Australian community. CISWA wants to acknowledge an international student who has demonstrated academic excellence and has contributed to enhancing the student experience both on and off campus.

CISWA International Education Provider – Best Practice/Innovation of the Year Award
Rewards the work of an individual or team in a Western Australian education institution that has contributed to the welfare or support of international students through, for example, communication support programs, pathways initiatives, or social inclusion activities. Additional weight will be given to any activities which promote interaction with Australian students, with the local community or which help students settle into life in Australia.

Submissions close 30 April. The winners will be announced in July.

Details and application forms are at www.ciswa.com
The last word ...

The valuable gift of choice

Imogen Forbes-McPhail

Imogen graduated last month with first class Honours in Arts. This is an edited version of her valedictory speech.

For some of you, this will be the last step of your journey through the education system. In my case, although this is the end of my time at UWA, it is not the end of my time at university – I will shortly be enrolling in a PhD program.

In fact, just last week I was in the United States visiting some of the graduate schools from which I’d received offers, in order to choose where I will be heading next.

My education here has given me what I believe is the most valuable gift an education can give – and that is choice. The capacity to choose whether I wish to pursue yet further education; to choose where I will do this; to choose, after that, amongst a number of career paths and prospective futures which, thanks to my education here, I am qualified to follow.

I want to talk to you about the importance of the arts in society, a subject about which, I think, we must all be concerned.

The arts are frequently undervalued by society at large, not seen as yielding the immediate practical benefits of science, technology or business, or lampooned for purportedly unnecessary or obscure areas of research interest. I am assuming that I do not need to justify the value of the arts to you – of the value of thought and feeling, of the benefits of intellectual stimulation, of preserving our history and coming to understand how and why our culture is what it is.

The immense privilege of being able to read words written a thousand years ago, which still have the power to communicate to us; of the fact that no university can hope to be taken seriously intellectually if it neglects its arts departments, and of the fact that countries which neglect the arts and education in favour of more ‘practical’ economic incentives are perceived as culturally and socially stagnant, and are taken, in turn, less seriously on the international stage.

Personally, I’m not a fan of the arbitrary, artificial division between the arts and the sciences – the so called ‘two cultures’ divide. To quote E A Milne, “the mathematician … describes the ripples of the pond in terms of his own symbols; the poet describes them in different symbols.’

Just as I hope those graduating from other faculties over the next few weeks will continue to read books, listen to music, and appreciate artworks, I hope you all will educate yourselves about scientific developments, and appreciate the beauty of mathematics as something akin to the beauty of poetry or painting.

Indeed, perhaps in recognising that the arts and sciences are inextricable from each other, we can effect the salvation of the arts themselves. In all fields, breadth of knowledge enables us to produce more inventive, creative and effective solutions to problems; use your knowledge, as arts students, to add breadth to contemporary debates not just in the field of the arts, but on all subjects.

A few years ago at a conference I heard a paper given by Eileen Joy on the marginalisation of medieval studies. Her solution was that medieval studies had to go out into the world and infect all other subjects, like a virus, until it was so interwoven with each discipline that it was impossible to extricate. In becoming necessary to other subjects, it would be able to demand the recognition that it deserved.

The arts, I believe, are already intertwined with almost every facet of human existence – but we need to bring this to light, show that this is the case. This is what I hope you will be able to do now that you are leaving university – not just confine yourself to the arts, but be creative, be daring, and infect the world with the knowledge that you have gained.