

Est. 1841 | YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Alumni Magazine 2026/2027

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Vice Chancellor's introduction

I am delighted to welcome you to the latest edition of our alumni magazine, filled with inspiring stories from across our York St John community.

As an alum, you remain an important part of that community, and we are always pleased to hear about your experiences beyond university. Whether you are starting out in your career, achieving new milestones, or entering a new chapter in life, your journey continues to inspire and connect with future generations of learners.

This year has seen York St John celebrate a number of exciting developments, highlighted within these pages. Despite a challenging backdrop for universities across the UK, our students and colleagues have continued to demonstrate the value of higher education, working with community and industry partners to further our aims as the University for Social Impact. In 2026, we also said a fond farewell to our Chair of the Board of Governors, Dame Julia Unwin, as she took on a new and exciting role as Chair of the Chairty Commission. We have since been delighted to welcome Justine Andrew as our new Chair. Justine joins us with a real passion for education and a keen understanding of the university sector, having worked as a partner KPMG UK with a focus on education, skills and productivity, and previously serving as an Independent Governor at Leeds Trinity University. On her appointment Justine shared: "If ever there was a time when society needs civic universities with social impact at their heart, it is now. I am honoured to have the opportunity to chair an institution that transforms lives through its education, research and deep engagement with communities across Yorkshire and beyond."



I think this perfectly encapsulates the type of university we strive to be, and I hope that as you read this edition you remain proud of your continued association with York St John.

Kind regards
Karen.
Professor Karen Bryan OBE
Vice Chancellor & Chief Executive

Welcome from the alumni team



Welcome to this year's edition of 1841, your annual Alumni Magazine. We hope you enjoy reading about some of the events, research and student projects happening across our Schools and campuses.

In the last year, we've enjoyed sharing your success stories on Alumination, meeting alumni at events and during your campus visits. In July 2026, we also had an amazing time taking part in a new challenge event to raise money for our scholarship fund. For more information about our fundraising work, please see page 5.

This year, we're excited to launch a new three year fundraising campaign to support more students reach their potential. Through your generosity, grants from organisations and support from our community, we hope to support 30 students a year by 2030.

Looking ahead, we can't wait to share more webinars with you, connect with you in person at our events and continue celebrating our alumni community.

Best wishes,
The Alumni Team

Our alumni community

As our alumni community keeps growing, we continue to share your stories, celebrate your success, and welcome you back to campus.

Sharing your stories

For the past three years, we've been asking alumni to complete alumni snapshots to share your stories and advice. Over 150 alumni have taken part so far, and we can't wait to celebrate more stories this year. From recent graduates to alumni reflecting on their careers after retiring, you can submit your alumni snapshot on Alumination.

Since 2021, we've been sharing webinars from across our alumni community. With alumni contributing from every campus, and across a wide range of courses and careers, we now have over 30 webinars available for free on YouTube. With six new webinars planned for this year, we hope you enjoy learning more about the careers of our alumni community!



Discover your alumni benefits

Did you know that as an alum of York St John University or one of our founder colleges, you can access a range of alumni benefits? Your benefits include discounted room hire at our York campus, discounted access to The Dock at our London campus, and free in person library access.

If you graduated recently, you could be eligible for our Progression Scholarship on eligible postgraduate courses. This scholarship could reduce your fees by up to 50%, depending on what you were awarded when you last studied with us. If you graduated before 2019, you can apply for 10% off eligible postgraduate courses, including PGCE courses and some Research Degrees.

Quarterly campus newsletters

We produce two quarterly newsletters, one for alumni who studied in Ripon, and another for alumni who studied in London. Ripon newsletters are sent in March, June, September and December. London newsletters are sent in January, April, July and October.

If you studied at our Ripon or London campuses and haven't been receiving quarterly newsletters alongside your monthly newsletter, please update your details by completing the form on our website, or emailing **alumni@yorksj.ac.uk**

Alumni networks and events

As an alum of York St John, you can attend a range of events including alumni networks, our annual Christmas Carol Service and wider University events. We can't wait to meet you at one of our upcoming events!



You can learn more about your alumni benefits, upcoming events and discover our blog on our website. You can also submit a snapshot, connect to Alumination and watch our webinars from our website too. **www.yorksj.ac.uk/alumni**

You can stay in touch with us by following us on Facebook and Instagram, just search 'ysjualumni'.



Celebrating our fundraising success

We are delighted to share highlights from our fundraising activities, celebrating the generosity of our donors and the energy of our fundraisers. From taking on a new challenge event, to connecting with supporters and securing funding from a range of organisations, these contributions are helping more students thrive at York St John University.

Trusts and funds

We are incredibly grateful to the trusts, funds and organisations whose generosity continues to make our scholarship programme possible. In particular, we would like to thank York Common Good Trust, whose support over the past four years has helped break down financial barriers and create opportunities for students to thrive. We were also delighted to receive a £3000 grant from the Portakabin Community Support Fund this year, which will support a York-based student for up to three years of study. Together, these partnerships are transforming student futures.

Christmas celebration event 2025

In December 2025, we hosted a festive reception to thank those who had recently donated to our scholarship fund or the CRYSJ Graduation Prize. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the generosity of our donor community and hear more about their motivations for giving. Afterwards, we joined our wider University community at York Minster for our annual Christmas Carol Service, where the magnificent setting and traditional carols created a special start to the festive season. We look forward to welcoming this year's supporters to a similar event in December 2026.

York Dragon Boat Challenge 2026

On Sunday 12th July 2026, a dedicated team of 19 York St John staff and students swapped desks and lecture halls for paddles and life jackets to take part in the annual York Dragon Boat Challenge. Facing tough competition, plenty of splashes and a lot of team spirit, the crew were thrilled to raise £3000 for our Future Pathways Scholarship fund, and over £1300 for Survive and the York Rotary Club.

As one of a small number of new teams to take on the challenge, not only did our crew make a splash on the day, they also created real impact for our students too.



York 10K 2026: Team YSJ runs for scholarships

Our fantastic team of YSJ staff, students, and alumni once again took on the York 10K on Sunday 2 August, continuing a successful and much-loved annual tradition. Team spirit was high, and for some, it was their very first 10K; a real achievement!

Every step helped support students from underrepresented backgrounds, giving them access to the opportunities and experiences that make studying at York St John so special. Whether running, cheering, or training alongside teammates, our 2026 team has once again made a real difference.



Help shape student futures

Fundraising is a fantastic way to support our scholarships and help future students succeed at York St John. Whether you join an event or organise your own activity, every contribution makes a real difference. Our Alumni and Fundraising team will be on hand with ideas, resources and guidance to help you make the most of your fundraising.

Read our fundraising guide or get in touch with the team to explore fundraising opportunities:

yorksj.ac.uk/support-us/

Upcoming events

At York St John University, we hold a wide range of events throughout the year. From book launches and performances, to thought-provoking Ebor Lectures and Inaugural Lectures, alumni are welcome to attend any of our University events. Many of our lectures are also recorded, so if you can't attend in person, you can still watch online.

Your alumni newsletter contains a small selection of upcoming events each month, but if you'd like to see the full range, why not connect with our Events team directly? Find out about upcoming events on their LinkTree: **https://linktr.ee/ysjevents**

October 2026



Black History Month: Throughout October, York St John will mark Black History Month with a range of events and activites, including a talk from activist Yasmin Benoit. Full event details and tickets will be available in September.

York Business Festival 2026: Now in its third year, join us on campus from 13 to 15 October for York Business Festival! Including workshops, key notes and more, please check your newsletters for more information on how to get involved.

Chancellor's Lecture: Join us on 14 October for our annual Chancellor's Lecture. This year we are excited to welcome guest speaker Mark Fordyce who will explore AI and creativity. Please check your newsletter for more information and how to book.

November 2026

Aesthetica Short Film Festival: From 4 to 8 November join us on campus for an exciting range of events during this annual Film Festival. A full programme of events will be released in autumn, and we'll signpost how to book tickets in your monthly newsletters too.

Ebor Lecture: Join us for our next Ebor Lecture on 11 November with cultural historian, television presenter and author based at the University of Oxford, Dr Janina Ramirez. Best known for making medieval history and art accessible through BBC historical documentaries, she has also written several books, including the 2022 Sunday Times Best Seller Femina.

Graduation in York Minster: We're excited to celebrate the Class of 2026 from our York campus as they mark their achievements. We can't wait to cheer you across the stage during your big day!

Ripon Christmas event: Join us on Saturday 28 November for our annual gathering for alumni who studied in Ripon. Booking will open in autumn and tickets will include a buffet lunch, a fun quiz and time to socialise.



December 2026

Christmas Carol Service: Join us on Tuesday 8 December for our University's annual Christmas Carol Service. This year the service will be held in our campus chapel. Including traditional carols and a student performance, free tickets will be available in November.



February 2027

LGBTQ+ History month: To mark LGBTQ+ History month, the University will be hosting a range of events and activities. We'll let you know when tickets are available in your monthly newsletters.

March 2027



International Women's Day: Celebrated annually on 8 March, York St John will be holding events throughout March. We will also share alumnae stories, including snapshots, blogs and webinars.

York Literature Festival: From bestselling authors to debut writers, York Literature Festival will be taking over York in March. We'll include information on events and how to book in your monthly newsletter.

Graduation in London: We can't wait to celebrate the achievements of our Class of 2026 in London! Make sure you've updated your details to receive information about graduation closer to the time.

April 2027

York Open Studios: This year York Open Studios will be marking its 25th anniversary! On 17 to 18 April and 24 to 25 April, experience York's talent and creativity at a range of venues across the city. Keep an eye on our newsletters to find out more.

May 2027

Ebor Lecture: Join us in May for the next Ebor Lecture, hosted in York Minster. Once details of the lecture have been announced, we'll let you know in your monthly newsletter.

June 2027

School of the Arts Festival: Every year our fantastic School of the Arts holds a series of events showcasing the work of their students. Including concerts, screenings, and the annual art degree show, keep an eye out for tickets in May.

Festival of Ideas: In June, York is home to the annual Festival of Ideas. From walking tours to lectures, there's something for everyone to enjoy! Including hybrid events, a full event programme will be released in May.

York Pride: Join us for York Pride as we celebrate and support our LGBTQ+ community. York St John will be taking part in the march, so please feel free to join us if you see our banners!



August 2027

Quiet Pride: Keep an eye out for information about attending Quiet Pride, a calm, inclusive and welcoming Pride event for everyone to enjoy. Quiet Pride usually includes bookable scheduled activities too.

October 2027

Black History Month: Join us for a range of events to mark Black History Month. Full event details and tickets will be available in September.

Chancellor's Lecture: Join us for our annual Chancellor's lecture. Full details of the event and who will be speaking will be released closer to the time.

With you, we can do more

At York St John University, we are committed to supporting students when they need it most and breaking down barriers that can stand in the way of higher education.

Thanks to the generosity of our alumni, philanthropic organisations and wider donor community, we provide vital support to students facing significant social and economic barriers to continuing their studies. This strong sense of community lies at the heart of York St John, helping us open doors, make higher education more accessible, and ensure future generations have the opportunity to flourish.

Future Pathways Scholarship

In summer 2026, we re-named our Alumni-Funded Scholarships to better demonstrate their impact on students. Our Future Pathways Scholarships continue to support students who face challenges accessing and succeeding in higher education. By providing vital support towards living costs, travel, and learning resources, these scholarships support students to focus on their studies and access the opportunities available to them. Students often describe this support as transformative and essential in helping them continue their educational journey.

Your support can change lives

In 2025 we received 138 scholarship applications, but could only award 23 scholarships. This meant we received six applications for every scholarship we awarded.

By 2030, we hope the Future Pathways Scholarship will support 30 students each year. With your help, more students can fulfil their potential and have a positive impact within their community.

By supporting our scholarship programme, you can help students overcome financial challenges and thrive at York St John. Every donation opens doors to new opportunities.

£5 A MONTH could help a student access the books and study resources they need to succeed.

£10 A MONTH could pay for a year's SIM-only phone contract to help a student stay connected.

£40 could pay for a one year railcard, making it more affordable to travel to and from classes.

£100 could pay for a student parking permit to cut costs and make it easier to attend late lectures or classes.

My scholarship journey

Psychology student and scholarship recipient 2024-2026



I applied for this scholarship during a very difficult period in my life. After becoming homeless and estranged, I found myself overwhelmed with debt and relying heavily on credit cards just to meet my basic needs. At the same time, I was juggling long work hours with my studies, and the strain began to severely affect my mental health. With no support system, and having experienced physical, financial, and emotional abuse, I was struggling to stay afloat academically and personally. I applied for the scholarship with the hope that it would relieve some of the financial burden and allow me to focus on building a future through my education.

"The scholarship was a lifeline for me."

It helped cover essential living costs such as food, accommodation, and transport, as well as study-related expenses like books. By easing this financial strain, I reduced my work hours and dedicated more time to my studies without constantly worrying about survival. More importantly, it gave me the mental and emotional space to focus on my health and my future goals.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to the donors who made this scholarship possible. At a time when I felt I had no one to turn to, your support reminded me that kindness and generosity still exist in the world. This grant was more than just financial assistance—it was a message of hope and encouragement that gave me strength to carry on. I am sincerely thankful for your generosity, which has not only helped me through this year but has inspired me to continue working hard and to one day be in a position to give back to others facing hardships.

My ambition is to continue my academic journey, either pursuing a masters and PhD in mental health, or undertaking Graduate Entry Medicine. I carry with me the encouragement and faith you have shown in me.

We're committed to supporting our student community, and every donation brings us closer to our ambition that every eligible student who applies for a scholarship can receive one.

By donating today, you can help students overcome financial barriers, continue their studies, and achieve their ambitions.

You can make a one-off donation by completing your magazine insert and returning it to us, or by using JustGiving. You can also use JustGiving to set up a regular donation to support our students.

www.justgiving.com/charity/yorksj

The School of Education, Language and Psychology

This year, the School of Education, Language and Psychology have continued developing their work with the wider community alongside expanding the breadth of their research.

Welcoming back a familiar face

In late 2025, the School of Education, Language and Psychology was delighted to welcome back TESOL MA alumnus Mitchell Culhane as a PhD student. After several years teaching English in Japan and South Korea, his doctoral work explores the transformative role of community language schools. Community language schools primarily support children from migrant, multilingual backgrounds by helping them learn heritage languages and maintain cultural links alongside their language skills.

In 2022, York St John University opened Yorkshire's first community language school. Mitchell's research, which has been funded by York St John's Institute for Social Justice, and supervised by Drs Indu Meddegama, Thea Karagialidis and Mattia Zingaretti will also explore the impact of community language schooling on children, parents and volunteer teachers. Mitchell hopes that his research will offer better visibility to such inclusive learning spaces and how they support linguistic heritage, identity, and community cohesion.

If Mitchell's journey has inspired you, you can learn about our TESOL MA programmes and our Community Language School on our website:

yorksj.ac.uk/courses/postgraduate/english-language-and-linguistics/tesol-ma

yorksj.ac.uk/working-with-the-community/communities-centre/community-language-school



Celebrating community success

It's been a busy and successful year for the Counselling team and the Communities Centre. After being nominated for two awards in 2026, they have also secured a prestigious conference for 2028!

In April 2026, members of both teams attended an Education North Awards Ceremony in Manchester, where they were awarded highly commended in the Community Engagement category. This award recognised their work to empower individuals and communities through high quality, accessible services with inclusivity and resilience at their heart. The nomination for the award also recognised the work of both teams in offering a wide range of services which foster lasting social and economic impact, including:

- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses to support the NHS
- Counselling services for our local community and students
- CPD short courses focusing on bereavement, neurodiversity, domestic abuse and working with risk
- Offering a Certificate in Counselling Skills course

In May 2026, the Communities Centre also won the YSJ Student Union Service Team of the Year award. This recognised the work done in the Centre by staff and students and it was an honour for the team to receive.

Finally, the Counselling team are delighted to announce that they will be the co-hosts for the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy Research Conference in May 2028. The whole team are really looking forward to this event. Please keep an eye on your alumni newsletters closer to the time for more information.

With thanks to Dr Indu Meddegama, Dr Trish Hobman, and the School of Education, Language and Psychology team for their contributions to this article.

The School of the Arts

This year, staff and students from the School of the Arts have been very active alongside their usual learning, research and teaching.

Welcoming Viborg City of Media Arts to York

Funded by the Arts Council and the Danish Embassy in London, Head of School Professor Helen Julia Minors, is co-leading *Open Doors, Releasing the Magic*, a project in partnership with REACH, York Minster, Knavesmire Primary School and local artists. In January 2026, eight staff members attended an animation workshop in Viborg, Denmark, as part of the project. In May 2026, artists and educators visited us for a full day discussing Design, Animation, Games and Performance, followed by a networking dinner with VIP guests: Cultural Attaché, Lone Britt Christensen; and Senior Partnership Officer, Arts Council England, Bill Vince.



Celebrating our Production department

In 2026, our Production department welcomed a new Associate Head, Dr Evi Karathanasopoulou. A media researcher, practitioner and educator, she has worked as a DJ, radio producer and broadcast journalist. In May 2026, we also celebrated the work of Professor Steve Rawle through his inaugural lecture. You can watch *Dr Monster: Working at the Wrong End of Quality* for free on YouTube:

youtube.com/watch?v=ouMqCAc--pk

In April 2026, we hosted the premiere of *The Final Beat*, a documentary created by Media Production MA student, Mick Child. The film explores the story of railway police officer, Robert Smith, who died whilst on duty during the 1942 Baedeker Raids. You can learn more about the film on our website:

yorksj.ac.uk/news/2026/wwii-film



TED success

In March 2026, Performance PhD student Gabriella Di Laccio MBE was named the TED Global Idea Search Winner in London! Two months later, she presented her research on music activism and gender inequality in the music industry, in Vancouver at TED2026. Following her TED success, she presented a lecture recital on campus. You can find out more about her TED talk on our website:

yorksj.ac.uk/news/2026/phd-student-ted2026/

Fine Art

In Spring 2026, students across our School collaborated on a special issue of *City Folk*, a York based creative magazine. Showcasing the work of Fine Art and Illustration students, this was a wonderful opportunity for students to submit work to a professional publication and work collaboratively with its creator, Mat Lazenby.

With thanks to Professor Helen Julia Minors and the School of the Arts team for their contributions to this article.



The School of Humanities

This year, the School of Humanities have welcomed new staff and subject areas to York St John University. Staff and students have also continued to engage with our community through exciting research groups.

Welcoming our new subject grouping

In Summer 2025, Sociology and Criminology migrated from York Business School to the School of Humanities. This created a new subject group formed of the Social Sciences, Politics, International Relations and Religion. Following a tight staff vote on some extremely good suggestions, this new subject grouping was named SPIRe.



In September 2025, Professor Alison Phipps joined York St John as the new Associate Head of SPIRe. Alison is a political sociologist, gender scholar and feminist activist, with a focus on sexual violence. With 25 years of research and teaching experience from the Universities of Cambridge, Brighton, Sussex, and Newcastle, her latest book, *Sexual Violence in Racial Capitalism*, was published by Manchester University Press in May 2026.

Hauntology and Spectrality Research Group

How does the past have a spectral presence in contemporary culture? Established in 2021, the Hauntology and Spectrality Research Group brings together academics, students and practitioners to examine how ghosts manifest, absences are felt, and unresolved histories shape everyday life. The group connects academic inquiry and creative practice through a range of activities, including recent projects on folk horror, spectral landscapes and the politics of memory.

The group also host a range of events, including:

- Publications and Conferences
- Public screenings
- Workshops
- Invited talks
- A Folk Horror Reading Group

You can find out more about the Hauntology and Spectrality Research Group on their blog: **https://blog.yorksj.ac.uk/hauntology**

Cinema and Social Justice

Film is a crucial tool for addressing social inequities and building community. The Cinema and Social Justice (CSJ) project explores the potential of film to uncover a range of pressing social justice issues.

In 2025, CSJ established the 'Warm Spaces' project in partnership with local cinema City Screen Picturehouse, York Community Energy, Portakabin Community Fund, and Kitchen for Everyone York. The magic of cinema should be accessible to all, and this project provides free, family-friendly film screenings for local people experiencing fuel poverty and loneliness. At each screening, cinema-goers receive a warm drink and the opportunity to access support from community partners, including advice on fuel and food poverty. Now in its second year, this project continues to demonstrate how accessible and inclusive cinema is an ideal venue to facilitate safety, enjoyment and belonging.

You can find more about Cinema and Social Justice on their website: **https://cinemasocialjustice.org**

With thanks to Professor Alison Phipps (SPIRe), Professor Robert Edgar (Hauntology) and Dr Lauren Stephenson (Film), and the School of Humanities team for their contributions to this article.



York Business School

This year, York Business School have been continuing to support our local community alongside their usual activities at York St John University.



Leading Change in Infant Feeding Across Yorkshire and Humber

Dr Ernestine Gheyoh Ndzi is leading meaningful, regional change through the Yorkshire and Humber Infant Feeding Project, and Infant Feeding Awards. After recognising the need for more open and inclusive conversations around infant feeding, the project was created to promote infant feeding as both a health issue, and a social and community priority.

The project works collaboratively with healthcare professionals, academics, charities and local authorities to improve outcomes for babies and their families. Through workshops, conferences, and awareness events, the initiative creates safe spaces for learning and discussion. By using an evidence-informed, compassionate approach which centres parent's lived experiences, the project also addresses stigma, cultural misconceptions and limited access to support.

Research from the project has already strengthened understanding of infant feeding inequalities, and helped bridge the gap between academic research and everyday experiences. Dr Gheyoh Ndzi also leads a breast pump loan scheme, providing practical support for mothers balancing work, education, health, and caring responsibilities.

Meanwhile, the Yorkshire and Humber Infant Feeding Awards celebrate individuals and organisations making a positive impact within their communities. Together, these initiatives demonstrate the power of leadership, collaboration, and community partnership in creating lasting change for local families.

Creative Business Skills Academy: Supporting Creative Entrepreneurs

The Creative Business Skills Academy continues to support the next generation of creative entrepreneurs across York and North Yorkshire. Delivered by York Business School in partnership with Aesthetica Magazine, the fully funded 12-week programme launched in 2024 to help creatives develop the practical business skills needed to build sustainable careers.

The Academy combines workshops, masterclasses and peer-to-peer learning to equip participants with expertise in key areas like branding, marketing, finance, project management and business growth. The first cohort included emerging entrepreneurs from disciplines including film, fashion, gaming, digital media and fine art. During the 12 week process, participants benefited from direct access to experienced industry professionals, strengthening their business models, networks and confidence.

Building on the success of our first cohort, the second cohort joined the Academy in May 2026. During the launch event, a panel of 2024 participants shared their experiences. Guest speaker Owen Turner also offered key insights into building a successful creative business.

The Academy continues to play an important role in supporting York's creative economy, nurturing innovation, developing local talent and reinforcing the city's reputation as a hub for creative excellence.



With thanks to Dr Ernestine Gheyoh Ndzi, Professor Brendan Paddison, Rebecca Biggins and the York Business School team for their contributions to this article.

Alumni spotlight: **Lex O'Neil**

Originally from Darlington, Class of 2006 graduate Lex O'Neil has worked on a variety of exciting projects since graduating, including furniture design, offshore renewable energy and most recently, Space technology! Now living in Adelaide in South Australia, we caught up with Lex to learn more about her exciting career, and how her Design degree has created a world of opportunities.

A design journey

In 2003, Lex arrived at York St John to begin her 3D Design course. With a mix of hands-on learning and theory, Lex was also drawn to York due to its Northern roots. The wide variety of sports clubs was also appealing, and Lex began rowing for York St John, becoming women's captain in her final year.

When Lex wasn't rowing or enjoying York's historic landscape, she was developing her design work. The opportunity to progress her design from paper plans to physical form was an invaluable experience which, paired with feedback and encouragement from staff, helped her refine her work. Lecturers and staff also emphasised the importance of use case and user experience to fully consider the needs of a user as part of the design process.

"Design is a journey and you get the best outcome by journeying with the people you are designing for… Design for inclusivity is one of my favourite aspects of design because design should support us at all ages of our lives..."

During her time as a student, Lex was able to earn her first design related income through a project with the Leeds Royal Armouries Museum. During the project, Lex designed a new exhibition piece for the museum. Although her design was not used in the final Shogun exhibition, this was an important stepping stone in her early career, and a key professional milestone.

From furniture design to subsea intervention

As a graduate entering the job market during the global financial crisis, jobs in creative fields were limited. In response, Lex adapted her job search to use her transferable skills to find design adjacent roles. Her first role was as a designer for Dalbergia Ltd whose focus was fine furniture, interior remodel and shop fitting. Alongside completing design work from scratch, Lex also began to develop key skills in project management. This included managing customer expectations through the design journey and considering a range of costs and material choices as part of each project.

It was this project management experience, coupled with Lex's Design credentials that supported her career as she moved into the civil engineering sector. Her work on engineering projects meant that she was involved at every stage, from risk assessment and method engineering through to contingency planning and implementation. In this time, Lex worked on large scale, offshore projects focused on both renewable energy, and oil and gas.

"Moving into the subsea intervention space from civil engineering was a real highlight. I had the opportunity to join a start-up division of Reef Subsea, in the field of offshore subsea ploughing. This was a field I knew nothing about and there was everything to play for in increasing my knowledge. I worked as an offshore field engineer on Gwynt Y Mor offshore wind farm, and it was just such an interesting project.

The farm location sits within the area where World War Two bomber planes dropped their unused artillery into the ocean, so the installation field was littered with Unexploded Ordnance (UXO's). The seabed in that area is also partially formed from London clay which is a challenging condition for subsea cable installation due to its density.

The opportunity to see a Working-Class Remotely Operated Vehicle (WROV) at work underwater was incredible. The parameters of the ocean provide extra challenges and there's a whole world we don't get to inhabit, but we need to caretake. It gave me such a respect for the ocean broadly."

After moving to Australia, Lex began looking for her next challenge. After meeting the co-founders of Fleet Space Technology and discovering their passion and ambition for both their company, and the future of space exploration, Lex embarked on her next career step. We caught up with Lex to learn more about her work in the Space sector.



fleetspace.com/space-exploration

What prompted you to apply for a job in the Space sector?

I was working as a Senior Project Management consultant prior to applying and really, I wanted more. I wanted to be closer to my design background and I wanted more challenges.

Did you know, it's actually easier to do work in lower earth orbit space than it is subsea? This is due to the environmental parameters, so my work on WROV's really crossed over industries to land me in the space sector.

Whilst at Fleet Space Technologies, you progressed to Exploration Programs Manager. What did this role entail?

The Exploration Team at Fleet looks at projects that constitute the next generation of space technologies. As an Exploration Program Manager my role was to lead projects, working closely with a technical lead and the engineering team to deliver project outcomes. Working with agile project management methods on new technology means a lot of change and design pivots to get to the desired outcome.

My role was invested in the entire project to make sure that it met all of its requirements: time, quality, cost etc. I also worked with stakeholders, project partners and suppliers to keep them satisfied, as well as making sure my project team was happy. This often looks like a lot of planning, negotiation, adapting and accepting when you could have done things better. It's taught me a lot about the importance of enabling people to unlock their own performance by supporting them and trusting them. My role isn't to engineer but to lead them to optimal delivery.

In 2026, you led the Moon to Mars Demonstrator (SPIDER) project. Please can you tell us more about what this project was, your involvement in it and the impact of this in the Space sector for Australia?

SPIDER stands for Seismic Payload for Interplanetary Discovery, Exploration and Research. It's a device that will be deployed to the Moon's lunar surface and use the micrometeorite impacts to the lunar surface as a seismic signal. These signals are then picked up by the device, and the resulting data will help us understand how the subsurface of the Moon is made up, and principally, if there are any water ice deposits.

SPIDER will be the first Australian seismic technology to land on the Moon in history. It will also contribute to future lunar missions like Artemis IV, where we will be returning Astronauts to the Moon's surface, and also contribute research towards future human outposts on the Moon.

Alumni spotlight: **Lex O'Neil**

What was your favourite thing about working on SPIDER?

It was just such an incredible opportunity! The transfer and adaptation of Fleet's terrestrial technology into the SPIDER for the lunar environment is so exciting. When we perform projects in space, we learn so much that directly improves life on Earth. We can thank the early Apollo missions for miniaturized computing, digital flight controls, modern materials like memory foam, medical monitoring systems and so much more. Our smartphones, so integral to everyday life now, were birthed from those developments along with so many more.

It's why I'm so excited about the Artemis missions. Along with being able to journey with astronauts as they directly experience space travel, we will also see a lot of new technology come into play. It's worth noting that Australia now has its very first Astronaut, Katherine Bennell-Pegg, who is an amazing inspiration to young people, particularly girls, to pursue technical roles in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

Can you tell us a little about the challenges of working on this project?

SPIDER is a small device, weighing less than 1kg, that is tethered via an umbilical to a lunar lander. Firefly's' Blue Ghost' 2 lander will manage the communications back to Earth from the device. But sensor devices typically collect a lot of data, so keeping the amounts low enough for the lander to handle is a key design consideration. As well as this, designing something totally new that you haven't done before is an incredible challenge. I'm so proud of the engineering team at Fleet and all those who have worked so hard to support it. I'm so excited to see it launch soon!

fireflyspace.com/missions/blue-ghost-mission-2

Looking ahead

In June 2026, Lex joined Minelab, a South Australian company with a legacy in terrestrial detection. This includes detecting gold, treasure and more dangerous things buried below the surface, like landmines. With a blend of commercial and humanitarian products, Lex will continue to use her core transferable skills of problem solving, data analysis and communication to continue developing her career in a new industry.



Do you have any advice for current students and recent graduates?

You are the next generation in your field and companies benefit greatly from the fresh perspectives you bring. When you are starting out in your career, it can feel like the company you work for holds more power. But you also hold power to think differently, bring new perspectives and innovate.

Struggle is universal but flexibility and taking paths that perhaps don't seem linear in your career can bring great benefits. The more you can be yourself at work, the more you can perform. Speaking as someone who is neurodivergent and queer, this lesson took me a long time to learn but I now lead with the motto, 'the more me, the more them, the more us'. The more I let people see me and be fully myself, the more comfortable they feel to be around me, the more space we make for difference in our teams to be a point of strength the more we can perform together.

With thanks to Lex O'Neil for taking part in this year's alumni magazine.

Postgraduate Research School

This year, the Postgraduate Research (PGR) School has continued to celebrate the achievements of our Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) and supported their development with a range of initiatives.

Training and development for postgraduate researchers and supervisors

Studying for a research degree can often feel like a solitary endeavour: just you, your supervisors, and an awful lot of unknowns. Thankfully, PGRs can now access a range of opportunities to develop their skills and attributes. These opportunities aim to both complement and extend beyond the support provided by PGR supervisors.

At York St John University, all PGRs are encouraged to take part in a Researcher Development Programme overseen by the PGR School. The Programme offers workshops, talks, and events across the following themes:

- Communicating your research
- Professional practice and conduct
- Methods, tools and techniques
- You and your research
- Career development

The PGR School also offers a growing portfolio of training to further support PGR supervisors and enhance the PGR experience. Looking ahead, we're excited to be involved in the ongoing Next Generation Research Supervision Project. This project is believed to be the largest ever research project into doctoral education, and aims to enhance the quality of research supervision across the Higher Education sector.

PGR School Annual Conference

In October 2025, PGRs and academic staff came together for our seventh annual conference. Led by an organising committee of PGRs supported by the PGR School team, this year's conference featured presentations and research posters on a characteristically diverse range of themes. As ever, the conference was both a fantastic showcase of postgraduate research, and an important opportunity for PGRs to build confidence and develop their skills in a friendly, supportive environment. We can't wait for our next conference in October 2026.



Apply to study for a Research Degree

Pursue your passions and make an impact on the world with a research degree at York St John. Join our community of forward-thinking academics as a postgraduate researcher.

We offer Master of Research (MRes) courses across a variety of disciplines, as well as doctoral level courses, such as Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Doctor of Education (EdD) and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA). Immerse yourself in your chosen subject, conduct high quality academic research, and make an original contribution to knowledge in your specialism. Your research has the potential to alter policies, approaches and practices in your subject area.

You can find out more about our research degrees and how to apply on our website:

yorksj.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research-degrees

For more guidance, you can contact our PGR Admissions team at: **pgr.admissions@yorksj.ac.uk**

With thanks to Lauren Cowling, Richard Bracknellin, and the Postgraduate Research School team for their contributions to this article.



The School of Health Sciences

This year, the School of Health Sciences welcomed students onto new allied health courses and continued to develop its research potential with a new visiting professor.

An exciting step forward

In September 2025, we welcomed our first MSc Operating Department Practice (pre-registration) cohort. As the first Master of Science course in the UK, this marks an exciting step for the Operating Department Practitioner profession. Based in our purpose-built simulation operating department, students are taught through practical application of knowledge and skills rather than traditional lectures.

So far students have experimented with electrocautery in the form of pumpkin carving, tested the flow rates of fluid delivery and run the department as part of a simulated minor operating theatre list activity! Alongside practical skills, students have also begun developing wider aspects of healthcare provision, including efficiency, time management and communication skills. We can't wait to continue supporting our students as they complete their course and progress their careers.

Introducing Mamma Anne

In 2026, York St John University became the first UK university to use the new, state of the art Mama Anne manikin simulator in our allied health courses. Mama Anne uses the latest technology to safely simulate realistic pregnancy and childbirth in a controlled environment. Students learn and develop a number of skills, including:

- Monitoring vital signs, including blood pressure and respiratory rate.
- Facilitating childbirth: Mama Anne independently gives birth and simulates different maternal positions.
- Obstetric emergencies, including shoulder dystocia, postpartum haemorrhage and maternal seizures.
- Patient communication by responding to Mama Anne's pre-recorded or live responses to questions.

In September 2026 we welcomed our first Midwifery cohort. With simulation and a hands-on approach key features of our new course, Mama Anne will be part of an innovative and immersive learning experience to mirror real life for students.





Enhancing research

The Interdisciplinary Sports Performance and Injury Research group (InSPIRe) were delighted to welcome Professor Stephen Cobley as a Visiting Professor this year. From the University of Sydney, Professor Cobley's research has directly impacted global policy and practice.

Professor Cobley's research aligns with InSPIRe's growth, maturation, and youth athlete development focus. His work on the H2Grow project with Swim Australia will directly inform a funded PhD based in Swimming in Australia's Northeast region. This PhD aims to explore the impact of growth and maturation on swimming, especially relating to injury risk, talent identification and performance outcomes. Having Professor Cobley's experience and global reputation contributing to the group is a marker of success for the University and a statement of his intention to produce world-respected, high-quality, impactful research.

With thanks to Dr Helen Lloyd, Rebecca Beggan, Dr Jamie Salter, and the School of Health Sciences team for their contributions to this article.

Listening, learning and supporting: a year of lived experience in London

Over the past year, activity at York St John University's London campus has reflected a community shaped not only by its global diversity and representation, but by a willingness to engage with lived experience in thoughtful, meaningful, and practical ways.



Her Story, Her Success

A key moment in this was *Her Story, Her Success*, the London campus' contribution to International Women's Day in March 2026. Through a photography exhibition and panel discussion, immigrant and second-generation women shared personal accounts of transition, resilience and identity. These included stories of building new lives in the UK, navigating language and cultural change, and balancing work, study and family responsibilities.

The event also marked the beginning of a wider research initiative exploring the lived experiences of women connected to our London campus and the surrounding community. By bringing together students, staff and local partners, the project has begun to build a clearer understanding of how individuals navigate change and support others in turn.

Supporting our community

In a different, but equally important, context, the Healing, Empowerment and Life (HEAL) event focused on how the University can better support survivors of domestic violence. Bringing together specialist organisations, healthcare professionals and advocacy groups, the HEAL event created space to explore the realities faced by those affected, and the role that education settings can play in supporting them.

Through presentations, discussion and a Q&A panel, staff and students engaged with approaches to survivor wellbeing. This included how to recognise signs of abuse, access specialist support and build more informed, responsive communities. The event also strengthened our connections with external partners, helping to bridge the gap between campus-based support and wider health and community services.

Shaping our campus

Taken together, these moments reflect a broader approach at the London campus. They point to an environment where inclusion is not understood solely in terms of representation, but through the ways in which people are supported, listened to and engaged. Whether through sharing personal stories or addressing complex social challenges, the emphasis has been on creating space for dialogue and ensuring that the experiences of students and staff are recognised within the life of the University.

For a campus defined by its international community, this approach continues to shape both the student experience and the wider sense of belonging. It is also something that alumni will recognise, as these values extend beyond the classroom and remain part of the connections formed during time at York St John.



With thanks to Cassie Price, Head of Academic and Student Experience, and the London campus team for their contributions to this article.

Our new Design Centre

Since opening our doors in 1841, our campus and our facilities have continued changing to meet the needs of the current and next generation of students. In 2026, we were proud to re-open our Design Centre and begin teaching at our new King's Manor site.

Our re-designed Design Centre

In May 2026, our redeveloped Design Centre was officially opened. With staff, students and alumni invited to see the new facilities, we also welcomed members of our Cordukes Circle and York Civic Party to the opening event.

Our new Design Centre bridges old and modern with a new extension to the existing 19th Century building. Our newest space echoes the modern design of our Creative Centre, and contains specialist teaching and working space for the following Design and Computer Science courses:

- Animation
- Games Design
- Graphic Design
- Interior Design
- Product Design
- Computer Science

Creating bespoke spaces

The new extension is at the heart of our Design Centre. The extension includes a large atrium designed to promote interdisciplinary co-working, and a range of bespoke studio spaces. The extension also includes a new digital maker space housing: stop motion animation booths, motion capture, and game design testing stations. Behind the building are workshops for woodwork, metal work, laser cutting and 3D printing.

"Our old building had heart, with students and staff working to make the most of their potential, now the building has a visible community heart in the atrium. The redevelopment ensures the Design Centre is now equipped to support innovative teaching, creative practice and student collaboration for years to come, while also contributing to the University's wider sustainability ambitions."

Professor Helen Julia Minors, Head of School of the Arts.

Developing our courses

In recent years, we have welcomed increasing numbers of computer science students to campus. Our new Computer Science suite includes integrated audio-visual systems to support collaborative and interactive learning. Our new suite will also be used for workshops, conferences and hackathons.

Looking ahead, the new Design Centre will be the home of our new Creative Digital Design degree apprenticeship. Combining academic study with real-world practice, the apprenticeship will build confidence, capability and independence in creative digital roles. You can find out more about this exciting new apprenticeship on our website:

yorksj.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/degree-apprenticeships/creative-digital-design-degree-apprenticeship/





Introducing King's Manor

In summer 2026, York St John began leasing one of York's most iconic medieval buildings: King's Manor. Located on Exhibition Square, between York Art Gallery and Museum Gardens, King's Manor is our newest campus location, but one with a very long history.





A Royal History

First built in the 11th Century for the abbots of St Mary's Abbey, many of the current buildings date from the 15th Century. After St Mary's Abbey was dissolved by Henry VIII in 1539, the manor became the seat of the Council of the North. It's unclear when it was first called King's Manor, but it's possible it was renamed after Henry VIII visited in 1541, or after James I visited on his journey to London in 1603 after the death of Elizabeth I.

The school years

In 1812, King's Manor was converted into a girl's school. It was here that Anne Lister, often regarded as the first modern lesbian, had her first relationship. During Anne's lifetime, she recorded her extraordinary life in a series of coded diaries, totalling 4 million words. Her diaries detailed everyday life, local politics, and her relationships. This included her relationship with her wife, Ann Walker, who she lived openly with from 1834 until Anne's death in 1840.

In 1833, King's Manor became the Yorkshire School for the Blind. Founded in response to the death of local MP William Wilberforce, known for his pivotal role in the abolition of the slave trade, the school operated at Kings Manor until the late 1950s when the manor was acquired by York City Council. From 1963 to 2026, King's Manor was leased by the University of York.



Looking ahead

We can't wait to introduce you to King's Manor in the months and years to come as it develops and becomes a key part of our York campus activity. Including plenty of office and teaching space, King's Manor will also hold events throughout the year.

Supporting your career

Did you know that as an alum of York St John University or our founder Colleges, you can access lifelong career support? We caught up with recent graduate Amy to find out how this support has helped her gain career confidence.

Career guidance appointments

No matter when you graduated, you can book a free, personalised career guidance appointment to discuss your career journey and plan your next steps. Appointments are available in person at our London or York campuses, or online.To book your appointment, please email: **careers@yorksj.ac.uk**

Ask Our Alum

If you'd like advice from alumni already working in your dream role or industry, our Ask Our Alum service could help. This service allows you to send career questions and seek advice from eligible alumni.

You can learn more about alumni career paths and who you could contact on Alumination:

https://blog.yorksj.ac.uk/alumination

Supporting recent graduates

In the year after you graduate, our Future You Team will be in touch with graduate support, including:

- Tailored graduate internships
- Invitations to employer fairs
- Access to our online employability resources
- Funding for new business ideas
- Global summer opportunities
- One to one graduate coaching programmes

Learn more about our graduate career support on our website.

yorksj.ac.uk/students/careers-and-student-opportunities/graduate-careers-support/

What motivated you to apply for the on-campus graduate internship programme?

I felt that I needed to build up skills and gain more experience in the professional environment before accepting a job offer abroad. This left me searching for a position that could provide this growth in the limited time before I started the job, which I had delayed. I signed up for the Graduate Success Coaching Sessions, and from there both my Graduate Success Coach and a previous lecturer of mine, recommended the internship programme. It was the perfect opportunity to build up my confidence within a fixed time-frame.

How is the internship supporting your career development and confidence?

I'm working within a very supportive team; my manager intentionally provides me with a range of tasks that develop the specific skills that I want to gain. The Graduate Success Coaching team has been amazing at helping me identify where I struggle most, and developing strategies to help me combat those challenges.

How is access to graduate careers support helping you plan your next career steps?

Thanks to the guidance of the Future You Team and the experience I now have, I have a plethora of evidence to remind myself that I am capable of taking the job I have lined up. I am also moving forward in my career with the confidence that the decisions I make are the right ones. Knowing I have access to career advice for life is just a bonus!

Amy Wyeth, Creative Writing and English Literature, Class of 2025

With thanks to Linda Hollie, Charlotte Moore, Amy Wyeth and the Future You team for their contributions to this article.



The Cruse Sisters: 180 years later

In 1846, Miss Cruse, Catherine Cruse and Mary Cruse were recruited to operate the forerunner to Ripon College, the Women's Training School. Now 180 years later, we reflect on their legacy.



Out of sight, out of mind

In 1841, the Men's Teacher Training School opened on Monkgate. Inspectors described the premises as inadequate because of the risk of poor sanitation and overcrowding. But when the men left for Lord Mayors Walk in 1846, the Women's Training School moved in, and quickly grew to 33 students within the first 18 months.

For the first six years, the three Cruse sisters were responsible for all aspects of the School: teaching, housekeeping, pastoral work and administration. Due to low educational standards, initial reports indicate this also included teaching students the basics of the subjects they would go on to teach. Unfortunately, their wages didn't reflect this increased workload. Mary Cruse was not initially paid at all, and Miss Cruse was paid a fraction of her male contemporaries.

From 1852, tutors from St John's taught arithmetic, drawing and music. But it wasn't until 1854, when previous student Miss Sampson was hired, that the School gained a full-time teacher to share the increasing workload. Nevertheless, the workload continued to grow. Over a decade after the premises were called inadequate, the inspector's fears had come to pass: the roof leaked, the laundry was impractical and students shared beds due to limited dormitory space.

Who was Miss Cruse?

The York St John University Archive contains a range of documents and artefacts, including the original 1841 register, and photographs of our earliest Principals. Unfortunately, similar records about the Women's School have been lost. We don't know the names of the first women who studied with us, or what the Cruse Sisters looked like. In fact, we can't even be certain about the name of Miss Cruse, the eldest Cruse sister and the School Superintendent.

In 2018, a blue plaque was installed at our Lord Mayors Walk campus by York Civic Trust to commemorate the pioneering work of the Cruse sisters. On the plaque, Miss Cruse is named as Winifred Cruse, based on the research of a previous principal, Gordon McGregor. However, both the 1851 and 1861 census records the School Superintendent as Henrietta Cruse. Frustratingly, anything relating to Miss Cruse in our Archive refers to her only as Miss Cruse, as politeness dictated in the 19th Century. Our Archives do not record why the three sisters chose not to continue their work at Ripon College, or what happened to them next. Our Archive also does not record what happened to the original women's school documents from this era.

Celebrating the Cruse sisters

Despite the difficulties the Cruse sisters faced, they successfully led the Women's School for 16 years. During this time, the sisters helped pioneer the then radical idea that women could, and should, be educated to the same standard as men. Contrary to fears that the curriculum would overtax women, the Cruse sisters created an environment that championed women and highlighted their potential. It is clear that without their resilience and dedication, Ripon College would not have been realised.

The legacy of the Cruse sisters is also clear in their wider impact. Their work directly improved the lives of thousands of people by raising educational standards. They also proved that women could achieve the same as men, paving the way for equal educational opportunities. Without their resilience and their pioneering decision to educate women to the same standard as men, the educational landscape could look very different.


Ripon College staff 1862

With your legacy, we can do more

Since 1841, York St John University has nurtured a strong sense of community, bringing together students, colleagues, alumni and partners to support education for all. By leaving a gift in your will, you can continue this legacy and help shape opportunities for future generations.

We are deeply grateful to those who have already chosen to remember York St John in their will. Their generosity is creating lasting change, helping us make a meaningful difference in the lives of students.

Education Opportunity Award

The Education Opportunity Award was established through a generous legacy gift left in the will of an alum's partner, who trained as a teacher here in the 1950s. Their wish was to help mature students access PGCE courses, just as they once did. With pride this legacy lives on in the teachers of the future. Thanks to their generosity, 22 students have already been empowered to pursue their dreams of inspiring the next generation.

"As a mature student with a family, and significant existing financial commitments, finance was the biggest barrier to undertaking the course. The scholarship has proved invaluable in meeting additional costs associated with the course, such as transport to placements. Thank you, your generosity really does make a difference."

Primary PGCE graduate, recipient of our Education Opportunity Award

You can find out more about leaving a gift in your will to York St John University by visiting our website:

yorksj.ac.uk/support-us/leave-a-gift-in-your-will/



Leaving a gift in your will is a meaningful way to support York St John's future. You may choose to leave a sum of money, specific assets, or a share of your estate. All you need is our address, charity number and your intention for the gift.

Address:
York St John University, Lord Mayors Walk, York, YO31 7EX
Exempt charity status number: GB 4498683

If you would like more information or wish to have a confidential conversation about leaving a gift, please contact us at **alumni@yorksj.ac.uk** or call 01904 876741.

If you have already chosen to remember York St John in your will, we would be delighted to hear from you. By letting us know your intentions, we can ensure your gift is used in the way that matters most to you and has the greatest possible impact.

With you, we can do more.

Est. 1841 | YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Alumni