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Celebrating Graduation Success

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The last week has been a special time for the University as nearly 6000 students collected their degrees supported by family, friends and well wishers.

Whilst achieving a degree is a special occasion for any student – here are some of the more interesting stories from another week of graduation.

To everyone who graduated this July, congratulations and stay in touch.

Sophie and Alexandra Pollet (twins) - BSc Business Management

Twins Sophie and Alexandra Pollet graduated on the same day both achieving first class degrees in business management.

Years of hard work finally paid off for the sisters, who celebrate their 22nd birthday today, but Sophie revealed. Sophie is now set to join accountancy firm KPMG, while Alexandra is will be heading out to Ghana next month to work on a charity project.

Sophie said she was “relieved” to find out they had both got first class degrees.

“Neither of us was expecting a first, so it was such a big shock when we got our results, we were just as pleased for each other too – it would’ve been a bit miserable if one of us had got a first and the other hadn’t.”

Pat Jones, of Birmingham Business School said: “They have both done exceptionally well academically and in terms of their personal and professional development during their internships.”

Hannah MacDonald - Medicine

Hannah MacDonald graduated in medicine watched by her granddad John Nunn who graduated from Birmingham, also in medicine, 63 years ago.

John Nunn has graduated not once, but four times from the University of Birmingham during his medical career. This July he’ll be coming back to the University to see his granddaughter, Hannah MacDonald, graduate in medicine as he did 63 years previously. When Hannah told her Grandpa she’d got a place a Birmingham Medical School John said he was ‘absolutely delighted’.

When John started Medical School in 1944 there were just eight females on the course out of 86 students. There was also only one international student. Nowadays, there are nearly 400 students on the course of which roughly 65% are female. John’s Medical School experience was varied and even saw him contract Small Pox after visiting the local Small Pox hospital where he says he saw some of the most shocking experiences of his life and led him to be incarcerated for three weeks. He also spent time fire watching from the top of Old Joe and witnessed German soldiers landing nearby.

In 1949, just one year after graduation, John and his new wife set sail for Malaya in the Far East as part of the Colonial Medical Service as an alternative to conscription. John reminisces that he had the most ‘wonderful training at Birmingham that really prepared me for the rest of my career.’

Hannah who also says that she has loved her time at Birmingham is ecstatic her Grandpa was able to celebrate with her on the day of her graduation. She will begin her first job at City Hospital but say’s ‘I don’t think I’ll end up in anesthetics though; I’m interested in Pediatrics or general medicine.’

Hannah Blakey - Medicine

Hannah has overcome enormous adversity to graduate. At the end of her third year, in 2007, Hannah was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. She wasn't well enough to proceed with year 4 so moved on to a Public Health course. She had 6 months of chemotherapy that year but nonetheless was awarded the best first class degree in her cohort. Hannah came back and completed her fourth year, but towards the end of the year she was found to have changes in her bone marrow that indicated she was developing leukemia. She completed her exams, passing with flying colors, and then had to take a year off to have a bone marrow transplant. Hannah had just about every complication possible, but she is a young woman of unbelievable courage and determination and came through it all and is now well. Her academic success was such that she has secured an Academic Foundation post working at Guy's Hospital in London - one of the most prestigious jobs in the UK. She starts work in August.

Sam Cooley BSc in Sport and Exercise Science

After leaving school with only GCSEs, Sam worked as a lifeguard for 4-years before deciding to leave paid employment and pursue higher education. Sam came to the University of Birmingham after completing an Access to Higher Education Course.

Sam said: “Although the Access course set me up well I had to work harder than most during my first year in order to increase my knowledge and grammar to the same level of my peers on the course.”

During his time at university Sam also worked as an Aim Higher mentor, mentoring and promoting university education to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Birmingham. He also started his own internet business selling jewelry to help fund his studies, which soon grew to employ five part-time members of staff.

After graduation Sam will go on to study for a 3-year PhD within the School of Sport and Exercise Science at the University of Birmingham.

Our Honorary Graduands

Barbara Slater - Doctor of the University

Barbara Slater is BBC Director of Sport and is responsible for coverage of the London Olympic Games in 2012. In 2010 she oversaw coverage of the Winter Olympics, World Cup, F1 and Crown Jewel events such as Six Nations Rugby, the Grand National and Wimbledon and, has also competed as an international gymnast for Great Britain at the Olympic Games in Montreal in 1976.

David Gill - Doctor of the University

David Gill is Chief Executive of Manchester United FC. As Chief Executive he oversees the business as a whole, with football and management staff reporting directly to him. David is also a member of the board of the Football Association, the European Club Association and UEFA.

Sarah-Jane Marsh - Alumna of the Year

Sarah-Jane Marsh is Chief Executive Officer of Birmingham Children's Hospital, a position she took up at the age of 32 making her the youngest ever Chief Executive of a Foundation Trust. In her career Sarah has worked in a number of planning, development and managerial roles for Worcestershire Hospitals, Redditch and Bromsgrove PCT, Walsall Hospitals and Birmingham Children's Hospital.

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