Welcome from Professor Anthony Forster

The University of Essex is equally committed to excellence in research and education, offering a transformational education to our students so that they can make the world a better place, and ensuring our research benefits individuals and communities. Our university is a community whose concern is not just with the pursuit of learning, but with the fulfilment of lives.

In 2018 we were awarded the accolade ‘University of the Year’ by the Times Higher Education. Judges said ‘This is a university that is putting people first.’ And we have done this by seeking to live up to the founding vision and our values by putting students and staff success at the centre of what we do…” The award panel pointed to many proof points – including a systematic de-casualisation of our workforce, ensuring we have no pay gaps by grade so that there is equal pay for work of equal value, and creating staff contracts for graduate teaching assistants. They also singled out that we are ‘unabashed’ in our strategy to recruit students based on potential rather than just prior achievement – and that we really do help all our students fulfill their aspirations. The Panel said “…what are universities if not communities of talented, committed people? By putting those people – both staff and students – first, the University of Essex has every right to its claim to be a “home for staff and students who want to make the world a better place.”

The University currently has some 17,800 students at our campuses in Colchester, Southend and Loughton and a further 5,000 students based at our strategic partners and 1,000 academic staff. In our University Strategy we set out our ambition to be acknowledged nationally and internationally as a leading research-intensive university. By 2025 we want to have 20,000 students across our campuses and 1,000 researchers. We also want to be firmly in the top 25 of UK universities in the Times Good University Guide, all of our subjects in the top 20% of their discipline within the UK, and in the top 200 universities in the world.

We were ranked 19th in the Research Excellence Framework 2014 and in 2017 awarded the top Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework. We are ranked in the top 25 for research quality in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide and are one of a select group of dual-intensive’ universities who feature in the top 25% of performance in the Teaching Excellence Framework. The University is ranked 27th in the Complete University Guide, 43rd in the Times Good University Guide and 64th in the Guardian University Guide. Confirming our global reputation, the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2022 placed Essex 25th for international outlook. The University is currently ranked in the top 350 in the world in the THE World University Rankings, with Social Sciences and Law ranked 72nd, and Arts and Humanities ranked in the top 175 https://www.essex.ac.uk/about/faculty-of-arts-and-humanities.

We have invested £80 million in our 43-acre science and business park initiative on our Colchester Campus (Knowledge Gateway), in support of our mission to apply our research for the benefit of individuals and communities. This includes relocating Essex Business School adjacent to Knowledge Gateway, the development of a 40,000-square foot Innovation Centre at its heart, and 71,000 square feet of office space for small and medium-sized businesses in 8 purpose-built buildings. Within the Innovation Centre is Studio X, the University’s digital creative collaborative studio and student start-up programme, containing state of the art AI/AR and 360 VR Video and animation studios. To support businesses, we have located our Institute of Analytics and Data Science (https://www.essex.ac.uk/centres-and-institutes/institute-for-analytics-and-data-science), the ESRC Business and Local Government Data Research Centre and Institute of Public Health and Wellbeing (https://www.essex.ac.uk/centres-and-institutes/public-health-and-wellbeing) on Knowledge Gateway. In 2019 the success of our approach was recognised by Knowledge Gateway being designated as a University Enterprise Zone by Research England and BEIS, one of only 14 in the UK. This provided national recognition of the strategic importance and momentum in making Knowledge Gateway a location of choice in the East of England for knowledge-based enterprises in science, technology, the creative sector and health.
Our commitment to European partnerships is a vital part of our vision as a global university and we are a founding member of the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) https://www.essex.ac.uk/news/2019/06/26/yufe-alliance-selected-to-create-new-european--university. Establishing one of the first truly European universities will offer students and staff so much more than conventional exchange placements. They will be fully integrated into our institution, make use of all University services and take advantage of the strong connections between YUFE institutions.

We are seeking to appoint an Executive Dean of Arts and Humanities at a very exciting time in our development. UK universities face unprecedented challenges, but we take encouragement from the University's growing reputation and standing, making significant step-change investments in our education and research capacity, and we are confident about our future. We have an enduring and profound commitment to the centrality of the arts and humanities to our University mission.

Reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor and a member of the University's executive team (University Steering Group), the Executive Dean (Arts and Humanities) plays a central role in the delivery of the University’s Strategic Plan. They provide academic leadership and responsibility for the financial management of the Faculty. The Executive Dean line manages 7 Heads of Department and is supported by and line manages three Faculty Deans (Undergraduate, Postgraduate, and Research). The Executive Dean is also directly supported in their role by a faculty support team led by a Faculty Manager and colleagues in professional support services.

You will be appointed to a substantive Chair (Professorship) in one of our academic departments, to which you will revert at the conclusion of your term of office. The normal term of appointment to the role of the Executive Dean (Arts and Humanities) is three years, with eligibility for re-appointment for a further three years. You may exceptionally be re-appointed for a further period of up to three years making a total of nine years. Upon return to your home department, you will undertake the full remit of academic duties including education, research, and leadership/citizenship. We recognise that, in a research-intensive university, research credibility is essential and a percentage of the post will be ring-fenced for research and we will provide research support as necessary.

The successful candidate should hold a PhD in a discipline relevant to the University, or have an equivalent level of experience, and have a distinguished academic record, including an internationally excellent research standing. A proven track record of successful academic leadership at a senior level in a higher education institution that includes a broad range of disciplines together with excellent planning skills, allied to well-developed analytical and problem solving skills are also essential. The applicant will need to publish in an area that allows the University to submit them to one of our Units of Assessment in future REF submissions.

I have been the Vice-Chancellor since August 2012 and you can find out more information about me, including my blogs on key issues on my Vice-Chancellor website and my tweets @Forster_Anthony. I would welcome a conversation with potential applicants.

Anthony Forster