

Invictus Silver Medallist Visits QAC!

We were really excited to welcome Team UK Invictus Games athlete Kelly Ganfield to QAC this term to speak to students and staff about her disability and experience of sport. Kelly was joined by QAC Patron Mikail Huggins who works with her as guide runner and athletics coach.

Kelly is an inspirational young woman who started to lose her sight at a young age after having a stroke, whilst working in the army. She now works closely with Help for Heroes and Blind Veterans to share her story with others.

For the last two years, she and Mikail have been part of the Team UK Invictus Games team, competing in Toronto and Sydney. In that time Kelly has progressed a great deal and this year she was the only VI athlete to compete, and they came home with a silver medal.

Kelly shared some interesting and personal stories about her life, the difficult times she has faced and what sport has given her. She also brought her silver medal along to show people, which was a great experience for many of the students. Mikail also shared



insight into his experience of working with people with vision impairment and what he has learned about himself along the way. It was great to see students from different areas listen, engage and ask some great questions with many saying they found Kelly to be really inspirational and someone they could look up to.

Although Mikail knows us well as Patron, it's the first time Kelly has been to QAC. After having such a good time with us, we really hope it won't be her last!

A Word from Bev



My first term officially as Principal and Chief Exec has been enjoyable and eventful. Student and staff numbers have increased, more teaching spaces have been created and a new senior management structure put in place.

We now educate and support over 270 high needs students, delivering excellent opportunities to all. Our numbers grow annually and there is no indication that this will reduce in the coming few years, despite challenges with funding. QAC has ambitious plans for the future and our strategic plan reflects these ambitious plans for our students, staff and services and the need to ensure longer-term financial viability.

Achievements for students last year are the highest they have ever been for pass rates and progression. Excitingly, our success has been recognised with QAC being highly commended in the AoC Beacon Awards 'Student Support' category and shortlisted as 'Specialist College of the Year 2019' in the FE Awards which is an amazing achievement, with results being announced in March 2019.

Finally, a festive thanks to QAC staff and all our supporters, partners, funders and families who continue to help us do what we do. I am proud to be part of the QAC team that makes a real difference to the lives of our students and clients and I look forward to working with you all in 2019!

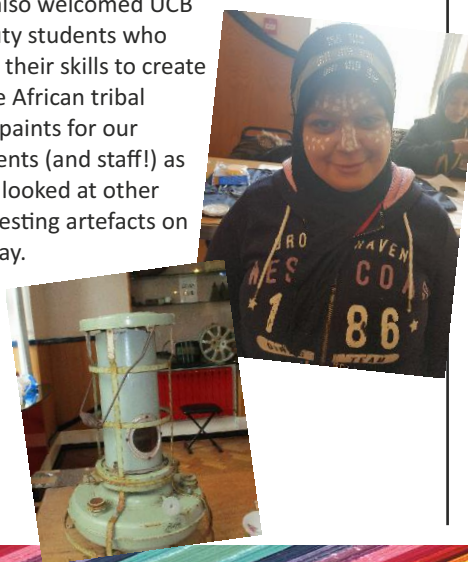
Bev Jessop
Principal & Chief Executive

Black History Month

October was Black History Month and as always, some great activities took place across College. Sofia's Steel Band visited again to teach us about the Caribbean and the history of the steel drums, with students really enjoying the opportunity to play a rhythm on the drums.

We invited Annette from The Kingsway Project to come in and give us a 'A Trip Down Memory Lane' as she gave an insight into what it was like growing up in a Caribbean household. As well as bringing some items of interest that could be seen in every Caribbean home, she shared information about the Windrush experience and what it was like for the people involved.

We also welcomed UCB Beauty students who used their skills to create some African tribal face paints for our students (and staff!) as they looked at other interesting artefacts on display.



Highlights



Autism Central



Sight Loss Council



Harry Potter Goodies



Student Council Voting



Jess Phillips Visits



IP Skegness Fun

SEPTEMBER

It was a very busy start of term as we welcomed our biggest intake of students yet, with 270 students enrolled. Yet more teaching spaces were created across the campus, along with changes to the dining room area, so there really is a buzz around the place!

There was plenty of baking and fundraising taking place as students and staff took part in Macmillan Coffee Morning activities. Hospitality students and Independence Plus clients hosted their own events, showcasing some great baking skills to raise over £300! Well done all.

IP clients enjoyed a trip to Skegness Butlins, making the most of the nice weather by taking part in a range of activities such as swimming, archery, football, arcades, lazer quest, crazy golf, beach walks, go karts and the fair ground. They enjoyed lots of entertainment in the evenings with the Queen tribute being a favourite!

OCTOBER

Climbing Club enjoyed two offsite trips as they took to the ropes at Wolf Mountain Climbing Centre in Worcester and enjoyed the fresh air on a lakeside walk at Arrow Valley Country Park. Renamed 'Outdoor Activity Club', students in the club are looking forward to more exciting activities such as orienteering, outdoor crafts and water-based activities that are in store this year.

Jess Phillips, Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley, visited QAC to learn more about how we support our students and the struggles we face as a Specialist College. She met with Bev to discuss various topics and issues surrounding colleges, both specialist and mainstream, including the vast reduction in funding for colleges in general, an issue which has been raised and recognised by all colleges across the country.

1337 ticks were counted as students practiced their democracy and voted for their Student Council representatives. 191 students voted, with 8 students being elected into post for this academic year. The Student Reps will be a collective voice for students across the College, with the ability, and responsibility, to raise issues and voice concerns amongst our students. Well done to all applicants!

Students Will and Jasmine took to the stage to share their stories of living with Autism at QAC's Autism Central exhibition. Both students did amazingly well, speaking with personal insight and confidence to a large audience of families and professionals, doing themselves and QAC extremely proud.

11 visually impaired students took part in a Music Arts Award, all gaining a certificate from Trinity College London. The course was delivered by the OHMI (One Handed Musical Instruments) Trust who work to remove barriers to music making faced by people with physical disabilities. Students learned about different instruments, music and sound, before meeting disabled musician Kris Halpin who is known worldwide for his musical ability.

As part of The Birmingham Sight Loss Council, some of our students and staff were asked to consult on the development of the Snow Hill area of Birmingham. They hosted a "blindfold walk" for the developers who wore simulation specs and were guided around Birmingham with the use of a cane. pic

Well done to student Ruth who, as part of her work placement in our library, emailed J.K. Rowling to ask whether she would be able to donate to the college, resulting in a full set of DVDs and audiobooks being donated!

NOVEMBER

Pennies and cakes were collected, counted and sold to support Children in Need. PFL Purple took the lead in organising this year's Penny Trail which raised just under £200 and Hospitality students hosted a dedicated café, selling a range of sweet and savoury treats, raising more money to help Pudsey help others.

Students worked in their groups to create a range of displays to mark Remembrance Day, with some great work on show.

Thinktank visited College, bringing their mobile planetarium with them. Students got to explore space and find out more about planets and the solar system.

PFL and LEAP hosted their annual Christmas Fair, taking over the main hall and Bradbury Centre to showcase the range of crafts and gifts they've been busy making, as the festive spirit got hold of people for Winter Woolly Day!

DECEMBER

LEAP Topaz were busy collecting toys and gifts to support Free Radio's Mission Christmas Appeal. They spoke with students and staff about what the appeal was for, sent information home and put collection boxes around college. Their hard work paid off as they collected lots of gifts before taking them over to the collection depot and helping the Free Radio team to sort through piles of donations.

Following on from our first 20th Anniversary Dragons Den competition earlier in the year, another round of ideas and presentations were held, with lots more student focused projects being supported – we can't wait to see them take place next term!

Positive Results for QAC

2017/18 was another fantastic year for student results and we wanted to share some of the highlights with you.

Student Retention

We retained 99% of students on their programmes, a 1% increase on the previous year.

Student Satisfaction

We exceeded our target, with student agreement in excess of 90% for all surveys (ranging between 91% and 97% agreement). High levels of satisfaction have been maintained over the past few years.

Student Outcomes

95% of students achieved their main learning aim on accredited qualifications and 94% of students achieved their non-accredited learning aim, both being up on the previous year. 96% of students achieved their Maths accredited qualification, an amazing 11% increase, with 100% passing their GCSE at grades 9-4. English overall accredited success increased by 10% to 86%.

Employer Engagement

Employers were asked to reflect overall how they felt the College had worked with the organisation in setting up and maintaining work placements. 100% of employers were happy with their interaction with QAC.

Employers commented: *"Created a strong partnership offering young people work experience. The support has been fantastic and students with a real interest in the site have been chosen to undertake the placements" and "students have been engaged, interested, competent and appreciative of the opportunity."*

Parent/Guardian Satisfaction

Overall parent satisfaction was 94%, 4% above the College target.

Parents agreed that staff treat their son/daughter fairly, they feel comfortable approaching QAC with questions or a problem/complaint and that staff encourage their son/daughter to become more independent (all at 98%).

Parents told us *"the atmosphere and learning approach is second to none. Everyone learns differently and everyone is taught differently. Caring, supportive, encouraging staff. My child enjoys coming to college" and "fantastic and supportive staff. Extremely caring"*.

Celebrating Inspirational Women

Thanks to funding received we have, under the Community Integration umbrella, run an Inspirational Women project in line with celebrating the centenary of women gaining the right to vote.

Students have learned about local Suffragettes and Emmeline Pankhurst as well as other Inspirational Women. We have welcomed Freshwater - a theatre in education group – into College, delivering workshops to groups of students about a range of women from various spheres and time periods including adventurous and pioneering women, women in the arts, politics and science.

Students have also heard from the local Women's Institute who spoke about their work to bring women together to make an impact, promote education and improve the quality of life for everyone.

As part of the funding we were able to acquire some lovely books about Inspirational Women and the Suffragettes, which have already proved popular additions to the library and will enhance students' activities going forward beyond the project itself.

After Christmas, we are looking forward to local visits and the culmination of the project - an exhibition of displays and an Inspirational Women Parade featuring students in costume.



Inspirational Women Activities



Hello LEAP HUB Creative!

This year we introduced a new group, LEAP Hub Creative, as part of the new Hub programme. The group will be very hands-on in their work, focusing on graphics, printing and running their very own enterprise! Students will be working on a range of units from the LEAP Awards.

The ethos of the group is all about being mature and developing independent and practical work skills for the future. Group sessions will concentrate on design, sign writing and printing personalised items. Students will eventually be designing and printing items for sale, alongside the ordering, stock taking and the administration of a micro business.

The group have settled really well and have already designed their own t-shirts, produced bespoke signs for the Trades Department and created personalised items for the Christmas Fayre.



HUB Creative Creations



PFL Blindigo at Bishops Wood

Following on from student groups' visits the last couple of years, students from PFL Blue and Indigo (affectionately nicknamed 'Blindigo') have been working hard at Bishops Wood in Kidderminster.

They were asked to get involved in a new project, creating a new garden area for everyone to enjoy.

Over a period of a few weeks, they planted new beds with an array of plants and trees and also made various items to be used in the garden, such as bird feeders, willow trellis and dreamcatchers.

They all had lots of fun and worked extremely hard, demonstrating a range of skills, including teamwork, following instructions and hard graft. They have truly done QAC proud!

Student Yoga

Last year, we introduced group yoga sessions to QAC as a way to help students, particularly those with high anxiety and autism, to relax.

Sessions proved extremely popular and effective and thanks to some donations received through the Fundraising Team we have, since September, been able to offer yoga to more students more often. We still offer the group session to PFL students, but we now offer individual one-to-one sessions to some students, all led by staff member Mel, who is completing a formal yoga qualification.

Yoga has been a great addition to the students' provision, supporting them with relaxation techniques and behaviour management. Families and students have commented on the positive results they have seen, and we're looking forward to developing it further and offering more wellbeing sessions and techniques during the year.



Student Yoga

Dancing for Dignity

IP and residential students came together in the name of charity and spookiness in October to put on a Halloween event for 'Dancing for Dignity', an initiative from registered charity, Dignity in Care.

The aim of the event was to use our yearly Halloween dance to raise money for the charity as well as to raise awareness of promoting dignity for all our students and clients.

Students worked hard, creating posters and decorations, with houses working together to put on an exceptional variety of food that would have fed an army and kept everyone energised for the dancing ahead. Costumes and outfits were equally as good, with lots of effort and imagination being used.

This was a tremendous event and encouraged everyone to come together to work collectively for a great cause, whilst having lots of fun! It also took some students out of their comfort zones, a challenge they more than rose to, so much so it has inspired them to organise many more exceptional parties!

PFL Blindigo at Bishops Wood



Dancing for Dignity

'Crossing Paths' Collaboration

In collaboration with our neighbouring Guide Dogs for the Blind team and Amey, we hosted "Crossing Paths: Working together to improve accessibility"; an event aimed at highlighting the daily accessibility struggles faced by people with disabilities.

Amey, Birmingham City Council's highways partner, specialise in working on areas such as highway maintenance and the management of street works and the focus of the event was to explore different roadwork set ups to see how they could impact people with disabilities.

Employees from across the business were given a short presentation before joining our very own Rehabilitation and Travel Training team for a wheelchair user demonstration, where they had to navigate around various obstacles whilst using a wheelchair – not an easy task!

They then met Guide Dog Natalie and her trainer, who put them in the shoes of someone with a visual impairment, getting them to again try the route using blindfolds, canes and Natalie's expert skills!

It was a really insightful exercise, with many of the Amey employees saying that the experience had highlighted issues faced by disabled people when they encountered unexpected obstructions and they would factor this into their work in the future.



Crossing Paths event

Events

Fundraising

Bad weather put a hold on our annual skydive day, with participants having to re-book onto different days in order to take to the skies. By the time this newsletter went to print, everyone had been able to complete their jumps, all thoroughly enjoying the experience and adrenalin rush. Patron Mikail Huggins was amongst the group, along with members of staff and Kat, who not only took part as a way not only to support QAC but also celebrate her 40th birthday! Well done and thank you to everyone who took part, testing nerves and patience in the process.

Festive spirit was in store at our Christmas Craft Fayre with over 30 stalls – including our very own Umberslade Nurseries – taking over the main hall and dining room, offering a range of crafts and gifts. Visitors were also treated to performances from the amazing Rock Choir (Birmingham, Lichfield, Solihull and Sutton Coldfield) to really help everyone get in the mood for Christmas!

Thank you to everyone who took part in our Winter Quiz too, another fun event which saw plenty of friendly competition between teams and individuals!

Looking ahead to 2019 we have lots of exciting events planned. We are already looking for people to join Team QAC to take on a range of sponsored challenges. We have places in Birmingham's Gung-Ho! Inflatable Obstacle Run in April and will be entering other events in the area too. If you would like more information on the challenges and events we're planning, please get in touch with the team at fundraising@qac.ac.uk or 0121 428 5064.

DID YOU KNOW...

As well as being a College, QAC is a registered charity, so fundraising plays an important role in the work we do.
Money raised through events, sponsorship and community support makes a range of student focussed activities possible.
Without your support, some of the things our students get to do would not happen!



Skydive Smiles!



Festive DWP Volunteers

Corporate & Community

Thank you to local quilting group Quilt and Sew Forth who came together to create a beautiful patchwork quilt which took over 6 months to make! Many of the group were new to quilting, but together their efforts raised £200.

Lord Combustion Services know of QAC through a young man who attends the College, so when it came to choosing a charity to support with their recent charity ball we were an obvious choice. The evening was a great success, raising £5000, which was shared between QAC and another local charity. In November, we were delighted to welcome representatives from the company to QAC to present the cheque and meet some of the students who will benefit from the donation, which will be put towards the costs of running one of our minibuses. Well done and thank you to everyone involved.

In September a team of employees from Barclays came to QAC to deliver some LifeSkills sessions to some of our student groups. They tasked the students with planning an event in keeping with a set budget, and were amazed by some of the ideas and details that the students came up with. After enjoying lunch with the students they helped with some garden maintenance and tidying, which was very much appreciated.

Employee teams from The West Brom were out in force at Umberslade, helping the team give the site some TLC. From painting exterior woodwork, to weeding, planting and trench digging, they were certainly kept busy. The event brought some festive spirit to the site as they helped the team decorate and get Christmas trees ready to sell.

Teams from DWP have also been over to Umberslade to help out with various tasks across the site, including the Half Term fun day. Our annual PFL/LEAP Christmas Fayre wouldn't be the same without DWP volunteers joining the fun, and this year was no different! Employees joined the fun as they donned their winter woolly jumpers and supported students on their stalls.

A big well done & thank you to everyone who has supported us this year, whether you've donated, volunteered or taken part in an event, we really appreciate it!

If you would like to know more about how you can get involved in supporting us, please contact fundraising@qac.ac.uk



Lord Combustion

The West Brom





QAC Enterprises consists of a wide range of businesses that raise money for College and provide excellent work opportunities for students.

They raise invaluable funds for the College and promote good practice in disability employment. Many of the enterprises offer students work placements in real-life establishments, enhancing their learning experiences.

By supporting our enterprises, not only will you benefit from first rate service and our friendly and helpful staff, you will be supporting our services for people with disabilities.

If you would like to know more about them please contact the team directly.



We provide a specialist service transcribing documents into alternative formats (Braille, Large Print, Audio) for people with a visual impairment.

Contact us on 0121 428 5018



QAC is the UK distributor of acclaimed Revolution Carbon Fibre Canes which are lighter in weight and more durable than traditional aluminium canes.

Contact us on 0121 428 5041



Open to QAC students and the local community, we are a fully equipped commercial gym designed to meet the needs of everyone including wheelchair users and people with limited mobility as well as able bodied members. Flexible membership options are available.

Contact us on 0121 428 5010



Located in Selly Oak, we are a rural idyll in an urban setting comprising of a small retail outlet, the 'Potting Shed' tea rooms & various horticultural facilities for hire.

Contact us on 0121 472 4894

Conference & Training Facilities available for hire

We have a varied range of excellent facilities available for hire which are ideal for conferences, training, meetings and corporate away days. Our friendly and helpful staff are on-hand to support your needs during your time onsite.

Facilities include meeting rooms and a sports hall.

Contact us on 0121 428 5041

CHILDREN'S PARTIES

The beautiful traditional yurt and sensory garden at Umberslade, in Selly Oak, is the perfect place to hire for children's parties. Or hire our wonderful sports hall - available evenings, weekends and out of term time.

Contact Nicky on 0121 472 4894 (Yurt)
or Dave on 0121 472 5010 (Sports Hall)



QAC Sight Village exhibitions are premier UK events showcasing technology, support and services for people who are blind or visually impaired and those experiencing age related sight problems. Events are free to attend and take place in various UK cities

For more information visit www.qacsightvillage.org.uk or call 0121 428 5041.

South-West (Exeter)
24 April

Central (Solihull)
9 / 10 July

South-East (London)
7 / 8 November



Autism Central showcases a range of products and services, with a full programme of workshops and seminars throughout the day. Entry is free and a full range of presentations will take place. More information, including date and venue will be available on the website in the next few months.

Queen Alexandra College, Court Oak Road, Harborne, Birmingham B17 9TG
Tel: 0121 428 5050 E-mail: info@qac.ac.uk

Registered Charity No. 1065794 Registered in England No. 3387540

For more information about what is happening at QAC and our Enterprises, and how you can get involved, visit www.qac.ac.uk or follow us on Twitter & Facebook.



Follow QAC on Twitter:
@QAC_Official



Follow QAC on Facebook:
Queen Alexandra College (QAC) Official Site

