

Marie



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ARU's Chelmsford campus is a great asset to the city

I THINK we're very lucky to have Anglia Ruskin University - ARU - in the heart of Chelmsford and I'd like to tell you why.

Last week, I spent a very enjoyable couple of hours visiting ARU's Chelmsford campus in the company of Vice Chancellor, Professor Roderick Watkins. I met some of the faculty staff from the School of Medicine, including Head of School, Professor Sanjiv Ahluwalia, as well as some of their fabulous medical students.

I also visited the Arise Innovation Hub and met some of the awe-inspiring small businesses and start-ups that have chosen this small corner of the university campus to call home.

And innovation really is the name of the game, both from ARU's perspective and from the perspective of the entrepreneurs that are creating new and exciting ways to improve the world around us.

I met the team behind Graphene Trace, who are working on new technology to monitor, alleviate and eradicate pressure ulcers for wheelchair users using graphene tech and AI. I tried out their new pressure-sensitive pad prototype, designed to be placed on the seat of a wheelchair, which checks in real-time where pressure sores may develop and then alerts the user to adjust their position. (Find out more here: www.graphenetrace.com.)

I saw the 'brain' of the robotic

technology powering Antobot (www.antobot.ai), which aims to revolutionise the agriculture sector by helping to make it more sustainable through the use of AI-controlled robotic logistics around farms.

And I spoke briefly to some of the team at Purple (wearepurple.org.uk), who are bringing businesses and disabled people together to change the conversation from one about disadvantage and inequality to one about potential and value (which, as a liberal, is something I wholeheartedly endorse).

All of these businesses are doing great things, right in the heart of Chelmsford, and I'm so pleased that they have chosen Chelmsford as their home and the place to start their journey and grow. The opportunities this could provide the Chelmsford community are huge - from putting Chelmsford on the investment map, to creating more jobs for Chelmsford residents, I'm thrilled to see them here and to know that ARU are supporting them to reach their potential.

But as good as these businesses are, the real stars of the show are the students and I was lucky enough, during my visit, to meet two distinct groups.

The first was in the form of three medical students studying at the relatively new School of Medicine. So far so normal. But what really caught my attention was that these are three of a total of 25 ARU students taking



Marie Goldman with ARU student ambassadors and Professor Roderick Watkins

part in the first ever Medical Doctor Degree Apprenticeship course.

This truly innovative five-year programme offers an alternative path into medicine for aspiring medical doctors who may not otherwise have gone to medical school. Those lucky enough to be given a place have their tuition fees paid for by a local NHS Trust.

Alongside their studies, which are exactly the same as students taking part in the standard course route, they also gain valuable and guaranteed work experience in various settings throughout the NHS. These range from studies looking at barriers to quicker response times from consultants being called into another department at a hospital, to reception work at GP surgeries. None of the apprenticeship work the students are assigned is clinical, but it provides important assistance to the NHS nevertheless, while giving the apprentices excellent firsthand experience of different settings and prepares them for the medical world they will enter once they complete their degree.

Speaking to both the apprentices and those running the programme, it was clear to me that this could be a game-changer in how we recruit, train and - extremely importantly - retain doctors in the NHS. A special part of this programme is that these graduates will stay in the local area for the two years of their Foundation Doctor training, whereas their counterparts could normally be sent anywhere in the country at this point. That has huge benefits for the local NHS Trusts as it makes it easier for them to plan their workforces. It also

has enormous benefits for the students who will have a ready-made support network around them - which I think is essential for anyone, but especially someone working in such a high-pressure environment. After all, it costs a lot of taxpayer money to train a doctor (tuition fees don't cover anywhere near the full cost of this), so it's in our interests to ensure that new doctors don't soon quit, or perhaps just as bad, take their much-needed skills off to another country such as Canada and Australia, as I've heard many British-trained doctors are now doing.

I think this sounds like a truly excellent apprenticeship programme - the only one of its kind in the country, I'm told - and it's brilliant to know that it's happening right here in Chelmsford. I only hope the Government continues to support it.

And finally, the second group of

wonderful ARU students that I met were student ambassadors - a handful of students who were keen to tell me what life was like as a student at ARU and why they had chosen to study here. I was prepared to be grilled with questions about my role as an MP or perhaps general issues about policy - and there was a bit of that - but mainly the conversation was about what motivated these inspirational young people and their aspirations for the future.

One thing is certain, from entrepreneurs to engineers, and from medicine to mechanics, the range of courses available at ARU is excellent, and matched by the vibrant atmosphere of the campus on a Friday afternoon in late February as I wandered around.

It's not at all surprising that ARU was named Times Higher Education University of the Year in 2023. Keep up the great work!

Marie



Marie Goldman trying out a pressure pad with Graphene Trace



Marie Goldman with the Antobot team