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# CAM





Want to give something back but not sure how you can make a difference? Six alumni explain how they are contributing to University life.



Cambridge was built on philanthropy. Colleges, professorships, bursaries, scholarships and buildings have all been made possible by alumni generosity. But financial donations are not the only way in which alumni help to sustain the collegiate University: time, skills and experience could prove just as valuable.

In fact, contributing in this way far is more common than many alumni realise. Lord Watson of Richmond (Jesus 1962) is a case in point. Alongside his financial donations, his expertise as a presenter of BBC programmes such as *Panorama* and *The Money Programme*, and as a doyen of advertising, politics and charring boards has proved invaluable. “So many people just think in terms of writing a cheque – but not everybody can,” he says. His voluntary work for the University began when he was rung by the Vice-Chancellor’s

# TIME. SKILLS. EXPERTISE.

Words **Olivia Gordon**

Photographs **Charlie Troman and David Yeo**

Top left: Ed Stourton  
Bottom left: Emma Fletcher  
Top right: Amy Hunter Pescetto  
Bottom right: Lord Watson of Richmond

office to say she had to appear on BBC Radio 4's Today programme – as it was her first week in post, would he lead a training session with her? “I did it pro bono with a tape recorder in Shepherd's Bush. She is a powerful communicator and advocate for the University and it was really good fun,” says Watson. Ever since, he's advised the Vice-Chancellor on communications generally. “I realised I could make a direct contribution – not financially, but in terms of knowledge and imagination – which actually has an effect.”

Often it's about professional skills, rather than industry expertise. In the mid-1990s, Watson – a history graduate – was surprised to be invited to join, of all things, the University's Chemistry Advisory Board. “It may seem odd,” he explains, “but they needed a non-chemist to give a different perspective. I had to lay out a vision for the contribution of Chemistry at Cambridge for the 21st century – which is, I suppose, an historian's perspective.” He's now doing similar consultancy for the Engineering Department, as well as being an honorary fellow of Jesus, Trustee of the Churchill College Archives, and Chairman of the Cambridge Foundation.

Of course, when you're busy establishing a career, ‘giving something back’ doesn't always seem a priority. Broadcaster and English Literature graduate Ed Stourton (Trinity 1979) now contributes in a host of ways – from sitting on the Alumni Advisory Board, to helping with alumni weekends, to editing a book for Trinity – but didn't consider reconnecting with Cambridge until later in his career. “Most of us go off and do things with life and come back to Cambridge later on. Your attention is focused on your career, but later on you have more to offer. We'd like to encourage more recent alumni to stay in touch – it isn't just about money.”

In fact, newer graduates are getting involved, for example, those of Cambridge's youngest college, Robinson, the oldest of whom are in their mid- to late 40s. Director of Development Helen Cornish says, “Many alumni stay in touch and contribute in other ways as well as financially. It is very rare for them to lose contact with the college entirely.”

Robinson law graduates host an annual dinner for fellow alumni and current students. John Pritchard, a former international rower and member of the London 2012 Olympic Committee, returns regularly to coach the Robinson boats each year. Many alumni are involved in graduate recruitment or give careers advice and mentoring to current students and fellow alumni by email or phone, or in person.

Starting up alumni groups is one of the most popular ways to re-engage with university life; overall, there are 332 regional Cambridge alumni groups around the world (the oldest known is the Cambridge and Oxford Society, Tokyo, formed in 1905). So why do alumni invest so much time in maintaining a connection with their fellow alumni?

Alumni like Lord Watson are playing a key role in advising the Vice-Chancellor on the strategy and direction of the 800th Anniversary Campaign to raise £1 billion.

A Campaign Board, consisting of 18 committed alumni and friends who have made leadership gifts to the 800th Anniversary Campaign, provide advice and counsel about Campaign strategy and work closely with other volunteers, hosting events and informing and engaging others. The Board, formed in 2005, is chaired by Sir David Walker (Queens', 1958) and Dr Bill Janeway (Pembroke, 1965) and meets twice a year in Cambridge.

Thanks to the work of the Board and that of many other volunteers, the Campaign will probably top the £900 million mark in the financial year 2008-2009. More information will be available in the Campaign Report, available at the end of November.

Victoria Kimonides graduated from Newnham in 1998 with a PhD in Neuroscience, and is now a director at Microsoft in Greece. She runs the Hellenic Cambridge Alumni Association, bringing together 120 Greek alumni from their 20s to their 60s to network and socialise with, as the group describe it, ‘likeminded, well-educated people’. They also support University activities in Greece, and the current batch of Greek students at Cambridge.

“I can still be an active member of the University. This is the beauty of it,” she says. “When we matriculate we become members of our colleges for life. My friends and family are amazed by the passion that I have for running the group – but as a true Newnhamite, I feel the need to give back and promote everything that I was taught there.”

The idea of ‘alumni relations’ was born the moment the first student graduated, but in recent years it has become more important and has seen significant growth. A University Alumni Relations team has been in place since 1990 and this year merged with the former

Cambridge Society. The new Cambridge Alumni Relations Office (CARO) has also established an Alumni Advisory Board (AAB) to help find new ways for alumni (and in particular, recent graduates) to get involved with the University.

Former Land Economy student Emma Fletcher (nee Veale, Fitzwilliam 1999), is now a chartered surveyor and one of the 11,000 alumni still living in or around Cambridge. As well as being heavily involved in the Cambridge University Land Society – one of the oldest and most active professional Cambridge University alumni associations – Fletcher has volunteered to sit on the Alumni Advisory Board.

“My friends and family cannot understand how I fit it all in with a baby, and going back to work full time,” she says, “but I'm lucky that I have an understanding husband and parents who don't mind babysitting or collecting 650 sticky buns from Fitzbillies the day before a dinner – and an employer who sees the benefits my alumni activities bring in terms of client networking.”

Even current students can contribute by doing outreach volunteering. “I want to help dispel some of the myths about Cambridge,” says Amy Hunter Pescetto, an undergraduate in her second year at Sidney Sussex reading Medicine. Hunter works as a ‘Cambassador’ for the Cambridge Admissions Office, going into state schools and talking to pupils, and working at guided tours and summer schools. She's been amazed to see the difference one person's contribution can make. “I particularly remember telling an inquisitive group of Year 7 boys that the Chemistry department was only a small part of the whole University,” she says. “They asked whether I lived in the Chemistry department, and were even more surprised to learn that students lived elsewhere in Cambridge, in Colleges, without parents! I'll never forget their genuine astonishment – it was so amusing and endearing.”

A remarkable 185,000 Cambridge alumni have made the effort to keep their contact details up to date – and as a reader of CAM you're one of them. If you're interested in taking your involvement one step further, the first port of call is the Alumni Relations Office to find out how you might help, whether it's by encouraging bright students to apply, starting a group, getting involved in events, or contributing skills and ideas to departments, colleges or boards.

“The financial generosity of alumni is vital to the University and very much appreciated, but the non-financial contributions are also critically important,” says Head of Alumni Relations Nathalie Walker. “We're fortunate to have a large proportion of alumni willing to give back their time, skills and expertise, and we rely on them to be our advocates and ambassadors in, and our advisers from, the wider world.”

Contact CARO on +44 (0)1223 332288 or at [www.alumni.cam.ac.uk](http://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk)