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21.01 - National praise for Devon Children's University - PLYMOUTH

The Devon branch of an international programme that is working to inspire children and youngsters through learning experiences outside of the classroom has been described as “visionary” by the national Chief Executive.

Ger Graus, who leads the Children’s University, has highlighted the work of [Plymouth University](#) and Devon County Council as “transcending boundaries” and said it should be “held up as a national example”.

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Since its launch in April 2012, the Devon Children’s University has worked with almost 6,000 young people, their parents, carers and teachers across the region in 65 schools, promoting the value of learning outside the classroom.

This has included special lectures put on by the likes of Iain Stewart – who is also Chancellor of the branch – and polar explorer Antony Jinman, and has seen the University bring on board a host of external partners including Paignton Zoo, the Eden Project, the Theatre Royal, and the Mount Batten Water

Ger Graus said: “The speed with which the Devon Children’s University has grown has been almost unique – and that is because it has transcended boundaries in its work with branches in Plymouth, Torbay and Cornwall.

“They can be held up as a national example – indeed when I spoke to Adelaide University recently, I advised them to speak to the people in Plymouth University. And that is what I’ll say to Shanghai, Rotterdam, or any of our international branches – look at what Plymouth has done and contextualise it to your own situation.”

The recognition comes against a national backdrop where universities are being urged by the Office for Fair Access (Offa) to work with primary schoolchildren. It has told universities that agreements for the academic year 2014-15 must include plans to work with children from key stage 2 onwards (ages seven to 14), as well as with adults who have the potential to be mature students.

One of the unique ways that the Devon programme has done this is by combining the work of the Children’s University with Plymouth University’s own undergraduate studies and Initial Teacher Training, so that students become trained CU volunteers, running after schools clubs while on placement.

Ger said: “Plymouth has been truly visionary in terms of what a modern day university should be thinking of when



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it comes to engaging with its community. They are well ahead of the curve in understanding that the impact of tuition fees is not on those going to university tomorrow but on the parents of those who are in primary schools now.”

Students enrolled at The Children’s University earn special passport stamps when they take part in learning activities, and every year, those who reach the gold standard of 100 hours will graduate on the Plymouth University campus.

Over 4,500 passports have been distributed across the 65 schools, and the first graduation ceremony is set for May this year.

Karen Turvey, Children’ University Coordinator, said: “We have so many inspirational teachers across the region who have helped us achieve what we have so far. The scheme has benefitted all pupils but in particular those who might have been reluctant for one reason or another to extend their learning.”

Representatives from the Devon branch have been invited to a celebratory reception at the House of Lords today (Monday), hosted by Lord Lingfield, to mark the fifth birthday of the Children’s University.

Dave Croot, Student Experience Innovations Manager at Plymouth, and manager of the Devon Children’s University, said: “The CU is focussed upon raising aspirations, boosting achievement and fostering a love of learning so that young people can make the most of their abilities and interests, regardless of their personal circumstances.

“These chime with Plymouth’s own well-established principles of widening participation in higher education and promoting social mobility – so bringing the two together has been a fantastic fit.”

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