**Mark Williams, School of Geography, Geology and the Environment (24.06.22)**

My name is Mark Williams, I’m a Professor of Paleobiology, and I’m based in the School of Geography, Geology and the Environment in the Bennet Building on campus.

For most of my career I’ve been a nuts-and-bolts palaeontologist, and I’ve been interested in the way that the biosphere has evolved on planet Earth over hundreds of millions of years, and that’s where most of my research has been focused, but over the past decade my research has become much more multidisciplinary, partly because I refocused it - instead of looking at the deep time record of change of life on planet Earth, I’m now very much focused on what’s happening at present in this time that geologists are christening the Anthropocene, the interval of geological time where humans have become the dominant agent at the surface of the planet.

I wouldn’t even think of endeavouring on a research project now that  wasn’t multidisciplinary, because I can see it’s a much better way of finding solutions to major problems. When I was starting out 30, 40 years ago, you had your disciplinary silo and you basically stayed in it, you often just looked at a particular myopic area of research within that, and if you stay in your discipline then you stay quite myopic, and you write something, perhaps a dozen people will read it. If you do something multidisciplinary that can build models that another group of people can pick up and develop and take in a different direction, the impact of that work and the number of times it just gets cited is much greater.

The future is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary, that’s where you can see - many of the major funders have been a little bit slow actually to pick up on this, they’ve stayed in their disciplinary silos, but now they’re definitely moving in that direction. When I started to do interdisciplinary work, and that’s more than a decade ago, I actually found it very difficult to get funded, because people would look at it and say, ‘Hang on, that’s a bit odd - really?’, and it’s changed I think, but there’s still some resistance I would say, that’s why LIAS has been such a powerhouse, because it’s been really good at recognising the strength of interdisciplinarity and has been very good at funding it across the university- they’ve been real champions of it.

If I was going to talk about my favourite place in the university, it would be the [Attenborough] Arboretum, because it’s a peaceful place to walk, it’s a nice - it’s a modified human ecology, there’s no doubt about that, but it’s full of life, and the people who are looking after the Arboretum have a real sense of trying to leave wild spaces within there, and I’m a natural scientist, so that’s where I need to go to escape the city, and it’s educational too, it’s very good in terms of its sequence of ecosystems from the end of the Ice Age through to the present, so it tick all the boxes for me.