Peter Ucko finished his last director's highlights column in *Archaeology International* (AI) by saying that he was sure he would find the job inspiring when he took over. I can confirm that he was 100 per cent correct. It is enormously exciting and inspiring, albeit somewhat intimidating, to be head of such a great organization with such an outstanding staff, not just on the academic side but also in the Institute’s support roles. Needless to say, it is also incredibly busy. I can’t believe how quickly the months since September 2005 have passed.

This has been a major year for staff changes, apart from Peter’s retirement, with ten new academic staff joining the Institute: Joe Flatman (Lecturer in Maritime Archaeology), Andrew Gardner (Lecturer in the Archaeology of the Roman Empire, replacing Mark Hassall, who has retired), Theano Moussouri (Lecturer in Museum Studies, replacing Paulette McManus, who has retired), Julia Shaw (Lecturer in South Asian Archaeology), Ulrike Sommer (Lecturer in Prehistoric Archaeology), Dietrich Stout and Ignacio de la Torre (Lecturers in the Archaeology of Human Evolution), Jim Aimers (temporary lecturer, replacing Liz Graham while she is on her last year as director), Bill Sillar, investigating the long-term shifting and expanding nature of these social use of the West Sussex downs. The archaeological project, directed by Todd Whitelaw, which began last summer and is the first-ever detailed multiperiod survey of this most famous of sites and its immediate surroundings; and the West Dean Archaeological Project, directed by Bill Sillar, investigating the long-term social use of the West Sussex downs. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Institute’s Field Archaeological Unit, together with West Dean College and the Edward James Estate, and will be the focus of the Institute’s field-training activities for some years to come.

The Field Unit itself has been going through an exciting period of expansion under the leadership of its new director, Dominic Perring. It has continued to appoint new staff, to invest in new equipment, especially for modern electronic surveying and geophysics, and to widen its range of activities. In recognition of the shifting and expanding nature of these activities, it will become the Institute’s Centre for Applied Archaeology next year.

The conferences organized by Institute members of staff have been almost as numerous as research projects, but I must draw attention to one of them here. Peter Ucko was very reluctant to have any event in his 90s, was followed by dinner and a party. A remarkable opening address by Thurstan Shaw, now in his 90s, was followed by a series of talks celebrating in different ways Peter’s contribution to archaeology and especially to exploring the role of the past in the present. What Peter didn’t know was that the conference also included the text of a book of papers inspired by him, edited by Bob Layton (Durham), Peter Stone (Newcastle) and myself, which was presented to him at the conference, much to his amazement. For everyone present, the day was a very moving occasion.

Three other conferences give a flavour of the range of meetings held: “Framing plots: the grammar of ancient Near Eastern narratives” (December 2005) was funded as the winner of the first Institute of Archaeology Conference Competition; “Archeology in the community” (June 2006), an initiative of Gabriel Moshenska, a new research student, was supported by the Institute and English Heritage, among others; and “Pattern and process in cultural evolution” (September 2005) was the final conference of the AHRC Centre for the Evolution of Cultural Diversity (reported in *AI* 2004/2005, which started on 1 January 2006). Thanks to Peter Ucko’s foresight in having so many new appointments approved in his last year as director, the Institute is in a strong position to cope with the challenges posed by UCL’s financial problems and the cuts that are now being required.

However, even in this climate, we will shortly be appointing a new lecturer in the archaeology of the Mediterranean in the First Millennium, to start next academic year. In other staff changes during the year, Nick Merriman, director of UCL Collections and Museums and also a member of the Institute, left to become director of Manchester Museum and was replaced by Sally MacDonald, previously manager of the Petrie Museum.

As usual, there have been major research awards to Institute staff since the last director’s report. Ruth Whitehouse and Kathryn Lomas obtained a further three years’ funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council for their work on the origins of literacy in Etruria and central Italy, and Kevin MacDonald received funding from the same source for his Cane River African Diaspora Archaeological Project, a collaborative project with the Louisiana Creole Heritage Center and the Cultural Resource Office of Northwestern State University (Louisiana). Applications to the Leverhulme Trust for major three-year projects were also successful. Andrew Reynolds received funding for his project Beyond the Burghal Hidage: the Landscape Context of Anglo-Saxon Civil Defence, Martin Welch for his project Beyond the Tribal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms in Southern England AD 400–750; and Simon Hillson and Daniel Antoine for An Interdisciplinary Study of Human Growth in London over the Past 1500 years.

Field projects by members of the Institute in different parts of the world continue to be too numerous to mention (see p. 9), but three may be singled out. The first is the Los Buchillones Project in Cuba, directed by David Pendergast, an honorary research fellow of the Institute, and co-directed by his wife Liz Graham of the Institute. This has won Cuba’s Premio Ciencias Sociales prize, awarded annually to projects that have made significant contributions in this field; it is the first time it has been awarded to an archaeological project. Two major projects that have just started are the Knossos Urban Landscape Project, directed by Todd Whitelaw, which began last summer and is the first-ever detailed multiperiod survey of this most famous of sites and its immediate surroundings; and the West Dean Archaeological Project, directed by Bill Sillar, investigating the long-term social use of the West Sussex downs. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Institute’s Field Archaeological Unit, together with West Dean College and the Edward James Estate, and will be the focus of the Institute’s field-training activities for some years to come.

The conferences organized by Institute members of staff have been almost as numerous as research projects, but I must draw attention to one of them here. Peter Ucko was very reluctant to have any event marking his retirement, but was persuaded to agree to a one-day conference on the subject “A future for archaeology: the past . . . in the present”, in January this year, followed by dinner and a party. A remarkable...