

THE  TIMES
THE SUNDAY TIMES

**GOOD
UNIVERSITY
GUIDE
2016**

UNIVERSITY
OF THE YEAR
FOR GRADUATE
EMPLOYMENT

160

buzz

February/March 2016

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Cultivating
Creativity

Vice-Chancellor's *view*



Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood

YOUR BUZZ

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Front cover image: Professor Tim Softley is the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer.

Our house had a leaking conservatory. It leaked from the day we bought the house, and, over the years, the leak became worse.

Water has that remarkable tendency to seek out and exploit any small cracks or porous membranes. Over the years, some of the plaster started to crumble.

We did what one always does on these occasions and called in our builder. As all good builders do, he sucked his lips and looked across to the new conservatory roof that our neighbours had installed. He suggested, in the nicest possible way, we could and should do better! After some discussions, he said that though we could try to patch the existing conservatory, it would be expensive and would not represent good value. The suggestion was that we demolished and rebuilt the conservatory.

After architects' drawings, the normal delays which applications for planning permission induce, and the difficulties in the current state of the building market getting appropriate contractors aligned, work began in November. Demolition was swift, and then digging began to lay the new foundations.

At this point, things became much more complex. It turned out, unbeknownst to any of us, that there were a number of services that ran underneath the old conservatory. As a result, mechanical diggers gave way to what our builders called 'a hand dig' (more expensive!) in order not to disturb key services to our house and our neighbour's. Consequently first-digging and then laying the foundations has taken much longer than initially anticipated.

As I write, the dwarf walls have been built and the oak frame installed. Within six weeks or so, we should have a completed conservatory.

Building and rebuilding organisations is much like this. Laying foundations takes much longer, is much more complex, and often involves much more careful and nuanced work than initially envisaged. As far as our University is concerned, the evidence is all around us.

The two great new buildings which are nearing completion on campus – the new library and the new sports centre – each had huge complexities in laying the

foundations. In both cases digging down has taken at least as long as building up. Foundations well-laid, and buildings skilfully erected, will serve the University for generations to come.

The University's broader strategy reflects exactly this kind of careful commitment to laying foundations and bold execution of structures on firm foundations. As readers will know, the current University strategy Making Important Things Happen builds directly on the foundations laid in the previous strategy, Shaping Our Future. In the quality of our education; around innovation in our curricula; in research quality and excellence; in partnership with business, industry, and third sector organisations; and in our international partnerships we are building purposely on foundations that we have laid in the previous five years.

Where we have laid foundations carefully and firmly, our performance is already outstanding. We can see this in the employability of our graduates, in the strength of our domestic and postgraduate recruitment, and in the flourishing of our international strategy and ambitions.

In some other areas we still need to attend to parts of the foundation. This relates to some areas of research support and may also relate to areas of incentivisation through our financial model. In these, and in other cases, work is in progress.

Taken in the round though, we have laid the necessary foundations. The coming years should be about building. In some cases, building will be continuing what we have already started to construct. In other cases it will involve spectacular new constructions. Either way the University will continue to look and feel refreshed and re-energised.

As with all building projects, only so much can be achieved at any given time. Much as our ambition might run ahead, there will always be constraints. Some of these will be constraints around resource; some of these will be constraints induced by external bodies or intrusive regulation;

EXPANDING BISS

The Birmingham International Summer School (BISS) was launched in 2014, giving international students the opportunity to experience studying abroad and sample life in the heart of England. Students were welcomed onto the British Cultural Heritage programme, where they explored the best of British culture by immersing themselves in art, architecture, literature, music, design and popular culture.

BISS is delighted to announce that it will be further expanding its programmes in 2016, which will include:

- Film & Media, delivered by the Department of Film and Creative Writing
- Global Energy Systems: Powering the Future delivered by the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences
- Biomedical Sciences: from Laboratory Bench to Hospital Bedside delivered by the College of Medical and Dental Sciences

If you would like to participate in BISS or find out more please contact the International Relations Office at biiss@contacts.bham.ac.uk or visit the BISS website www.birmingham.ac.uk/biiss



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and some of these will be constraints where progress in improving performance is not as rapid as we might all wish. Being realistic about those things which constrain will enable us either to overcome or work around them.

Even a large and successful organisation such as our University can only absorb so much at any one time. We see this in the capital programme where, in order to ensure that there is continuity in key University activities, we can only build so much at any given time. We see this too in the way in which reputations are measured, with us having to wait probably another five years for the next REF results,

BIRMINGHAM GLOBAL

NORTH AMERICA

The 'Birmingham-Illinois Partnership for Discovery, Engagement and Education' (BRIDGE) agreement between UoB and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was launched in March 2014. It established a framework for creative knowledge exchange across disciplines through frequent, purposeful, face-to-face meetings between faculty, staff and students at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Our relationship with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been progressing well, and an exciting new Fellowship Initiative was launched in December 2015. To date, there are an estimated 55 individual faculty-driven collaborations in progress between the two Universities across the whole range of disciplines.

An annual BRIDGE Seed Fund of \$200,000 has been jointly established to stimulate wider academic engagement between the two Universities. There are no restrictions on the forms of activity undertaken with BRIDGE funding, providing they meet the criteria outlined in the guidelines. **The call for the 2015-16 academic year is now open with a closing deadline of 28 February 2016.**

BRIDGE Fellows Programme

An agreement to launch the 'Fellows Scheme' was signed by Provost Adam Tickell in December 2015. The scheme aims to recruit around four Birmingham-Illinois BRIDGE Fellows in targeted research areas, to commence in September 2016. The Fellows would be employed by the University of Birmingham for a three-year term and spend one year conducting research at the University of Illinois. The research priority areas for these Fellowships will be:

- Ageing and cognition
- Brain trauma
- Medical engineering
- Cultural heritage, tourism and Economic development
- Diversity, race and education

It is anticipated that the BRIDGE Fellows will maintain research collaborations and connections with their Illinois colleagues. **Applications for the Fellowships will open in early 2016.**

Learn more

www.birminghamillinoisbridge.org

while recognising the inevitable lags in external measures of esteem; notably international league tables.

None of this should discourage us. Where the foundations are firm, and the architecture is sound and imaginative, what we build will be spectacular and sustainable.

So, just as with our conservatory, we will end up with structures that work, structures that will delight us, and structures which will endure for years to come.

*Vice-Chancellor,
Professor Sir David Eastwood*

MEXICO

After the successful 'Year of Mexico in the UK' which occurred in 2015, the University of Birmingham has become one of 12 UK universities and 12 Mexican universities to embark on a new initiative to deepen academic links between the two countries. The Mexico-UK Visiting Chair Initiative will see senior figures from prestigious UK and Mexican universities spend up to two weeks each year working collaboratively to explore new and exciting links in research and teaching.

FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT 2016

29 FEBRUARY–11 MARCH

This year's Fairtrade Fortnight events will include:

Green Supplier Fair and Ethical Market

2 March, 11.00am–3.00pm, Great Hall

Some of our key suppliers will be showcasing the ways in which they are helping the University to reduce its carbon footprint. You can sample Fairtrade drinks and snacks and learn about other sustainable initiatives. There will also be an opportunity to purchase ethically sourced goods from the Ethical Market, so don't forget to bring some money!

Fairtrade Debate

9 March 5.00pm, Business School Lecture Theatre

This will be a joint event with Fairtrade Association Birmingham, the organisation that maintains the city's Fairtrade status. Students from Holyhead School will debate the Motion 'This House believes that Free Trade provides the best means for attaining Fair Trade'.

Fairtrade Wine Tasting

10 March, 6.00pm, Staff House

This ever-popular event will be held once again in Café Aroma, on the 1st floor of Staff House. The Guild's Oxfam Outreach and Wine Societies will host the event and a variety of Fairtrade wines will be available to sample. Everyone is welcome. Tickets cost £7.00 and you can pay on the door.

Date for the diary

Vice-Chancellor's Open Forum

Tuesday 9 February, 12.30–1.30pm
Elgar Concert Hall, Bramall Music Building

Join the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood in conversation with Stephen Khan, Editor of *The Conversation UK*. The Vice-Chancellor will be interviewed on key issues facing the Higher Education sector and the University of Birmingham. The forum is your chance to hear from the Vice-Chancellor and share your thoughts.

Date for the diary

Birmingham Professional Forum

Tuesday 8 March, 2.00–3.00pm
Elgar Concert Hall, Bramall Music Building

Introduced by the Registrar and Secretary, Lee Sanders, the forum is a great opportunity to hear from colleagues on a wide range of topical subjects for both staff and the University.

Help us tackle childhood cancer



This February, staff from across the University are joining together to raise funds for life-changing cancer research taking place right here on campus.

Staff Fundraising Week, 15–19 February, will see a variety of fundraising events and activities taking place, culminating on the day of the BUAFTA (Birmingham University Awards for Tremendous Achievement) ceremony.

Activities will raise funds for Dr Frank Mussai's research into childhood cancer, which looks at the way cancer interacts with a person's immune system with the aim of developing new forms of treatment.

Get involved

During the week you can organise or attend an event, or take part in a sponsored challenge; from bake sales to a silly socks day, a quiz or a book sale, there are plenty of ideas and information on the website: www.bham.ac.uk/stafffundraising. Alternatively you can contact Clare Weston at fundraiseforum@contacts.bham.ac.uk or on ext. 48895.

You can also buy BUAFTA raffle tickets from your local champion or online at: intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/BUAFTAS. The page also includes more information on the BUAFTAs and a full list of prizes.

CELEBRATING LGBT HISTORY MONTH

As the University prepares to celebrate LGBT History Month in February and International Women's Day in March, the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Equalities, Professor Una Martin explains why events such as these are such an important part of the University's Equality Agenda.

I believe that our equality agenda is central to the University's core mission to be a global force in teaching and research. In order to be successful we must encourage each and every person to flourish while removing barriers to success. Our talented community will only realise its full potential if we recognise that diversity enriches our campus; participation will only be possible if we hear the voices of our students and staff and support them in all aspects of their careers.

The new University Equality Scheme 2016–2020 will be launched shortly and includes clear objectives for the next four years. We have set ourselves a challenging and ambitious agenda, and our Action Plan will be measured against defined benchmarks of success.

I am conscious however, that there is a danger that equalities work can be seen as 'just another strategy' – something dry, process driven and removed from our everyday experience. Our equality events,

such as LGBT History Month and International Women's Day are a chance to bring these issues to life and remind us that equality is about people, and is important to each and every one of us.

There is something very special about being able to celebrate these events in a University environment in which we encourage debate, foster innovation and champion individual's rights to free speech and self-expression. Each celebration relies on the commitment of a team of students and staff who work together to create a programme of events that reflects their passions and interests.

I hope that you will join us in celebrating equality and diversity at our events throughout the year. If you have not booked already, do join us at our LGBT History Launch even on Friday 5 February, where the opening speaker will be Dame Julie Moore, Chief Executive of University Hospitals Birmingham and national LGBT role model.



Professor Una Martin

If you would like to be involved in our plans for celebrating other equality events later in the year, such as Black History Month, or Focus on Disability, do get please get in touch at: equality@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Learn more

Further information on LGBT History Month, and to book a place for the LGBT History Month Launch Event www.birmingham.ac.uk/LGBT2016

LGBTQ Students Association:
www.facebook.com/UoB.LGBTQ

Further information on IWD Website:
www.birmingham.ac.uk/iwd2016

Guild of Students
Women's Association
www.facebook.com/WomensUoB



transforming OUR campus

Education Secretary opens pioneering school

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan MP visited the new University of Birmingham School in December to meet pupils and teachers, and declare the new School officially open.

Mrs Morgan also toured the ground-breaking School, the first 11–18 university training school in the country, which is situated in a purpose-built facility on the University's Selly Oak campus. Drawing its pupils from across the city, the School's vision is to ensure the School community reflects the diversity of the city of Birmingham and transforms the lives of its pupils by raising aspirations.

It welcomed its first pupils in September this year, with an intake of 150 Year 7 pupils and 200 lower sixth formers. It will grow to its full capacity of 1,150 pupils by 2020.

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan said: *'I am delighted to be opening the University of Birmingham School, which I hope will become a beacon of*

academic excellence in the West Midlands. We are determined to spread educational excellence everywhere and at the heart of this is empowering our best institutions – including universities – to be able to open free schools in order to use their expertise to transform the lives of children.

'The University of Birmingham School can play a crucial role in uniting the city under the banner of educational excellence, bringing its diverse communities together through the promise of a rigorous academic education.'

Principal Michael Roden said: *'We were delighted to be able to welcome the Secretary of State to our School to formally declare the building open. And, as we reflect on all of the hard work, passion and shared vision which brought us together to prepare our School for opening, we must now together recognise that it is our responsibility as a school community to fulfil the effort, the care, the professionalism, and the passion that everyone involved has put into our foundations.*

'We will now work together to achieve our vision to be a school for everyone, a school for Birmingham, and a school for the future.'

During the official opening event, which also saw parents, supporters, local community representatives and



Nicky Morgan MP and Michael Roden at the official opening

key figures in the establishment of the School present, Mrs Morgan witnessed some of the varied enrichment activities in which pupils participate. This included work for the Chemistry Olympiad and a paired reading project. Mrs Morgan and other guests were also addressed by the sixth form committee chairs, who described what it was like to be one of the first pupils at the School.

Lee Sanders, Registrar and Secretary at the University, said: *'The official opening of the University of Birmingham School is a momentous occasion for the University – the culmination of years of hard work and endeavour to make the vision of a university training school a reality.*

'The opening of this School expands the University's commitment to our civic responsibility and builds on our extensive existing programme of outreach work with local schools to further promote a seamless transition from secondary education to higher education through its academic sixth form. It is a pioneering venture in so many ways, and another 'first' for the University.'



Nicky Morgan MP meets teachers and pupils at the official opening

'A pioneering
venture'

CTL Phase 1 draws closer

Work on the first phase of the Collaborative Teaching Laboratory draws nearer to completion this year as contractors continue to develop the new engineering lab within mechanical engineering.

The Phase 1 development will be followed by phase 2 – a new building housing a wet lab, dry lab and e-lab – which will begin next year.

But from this September, students will be able to enjoy the new state-of-the-art engineering space which includes an automotive space – with a crane running the full length of the ceiling – and a space with reinforced string walls and floors, to allow concrete beams to be tested for strength.

The £3.4 million laboratory will also include several flexible spaces with movable workbenches and hanging electricity supplies, all designed to facilitate inter-disciplinary working for undergraduate students.



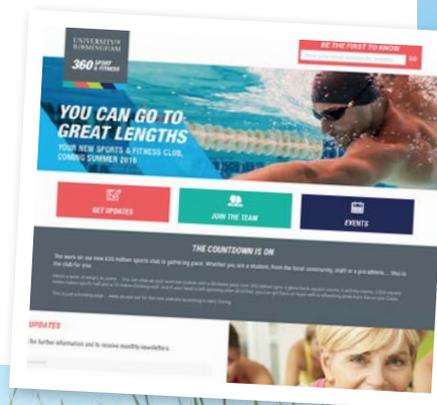
An artist's impression of the automotive space inside phase 1 of the CTL

New sports club name unveiled

Returning to campus after the Christmas break, the enormity and quality of the new sports building on the south side of campus is now very apparent. As we move into the final six months of construction, emphasis is shifting to internal fit-out including Birmingham's first 50m pool (with its adjustable boom and moveable floor), large and small sports halls, 200+ station gym, six glass-backed squash courts and five studios. It will also provide a new home for the Sport Performance and Wellbeing Centre.

In advance of its opening in mid-summer, the facility's name has been announced. It will be called 360 Sport & Fitness, to reflect the range of facilities, classes and expertise on offer to members and non-members.

Details of membership options, classes and other opportunities will be unveiled soon via a new 360 website. In the meantime you can follow progress via <http://360birmingham.co.uk>



Watson Building work continues

A complete rewire of the Watson Building, which will see a new lighting system installed, will continue this year after significant progress was made on the year-long project in the first term of the academic year.

Contractors are working to keep disruption to a minimum – this includes carrying out the most disruptive work before 9.00am, to avoid the times when lectures and seminars are taking place. The entire project is expected to be completed by the summer.

A history of Social Work

The mission of Birmingham's School of Social Policy is 'to understand the world – but also to change it', and nowhere is this more apparent than in the University's groundbreaking social work programmes.

In 1898, an advert appeared in a local journal:

'The Women's Settlement Committee are anxious to hear of a house which would be suitable for a Residence. It should have accommodation for a Warden, two or three Residents and a Servant. A large room which could be used for meetings and parties etc. would be a great addition. The house must be in a poor district, but the committee would like to find one in as airy a situation as possible, and it should be near a tram or omnibus route. Rent about £40.'

Unbeknownst to many, this advert was to mark the beginning of the Birmingham Settlement, which started work in 1899 to improve the lives of families in Birmingham's inner city. Key to the Settlement movement was the notion that people keen to make a practical difference should learn about the realities of poverty at first-hand, and take on the role of neighbour as well as 'worker'. For those familiar with the TV programme, *Peaky Blinders*, Thomas Shelby's enemy, Billy Kimber, was a real person and came from the Summer Lane district of Birmingham where the Settlement was based.

The Settlement is still going strong, but it soon realised that settlers needed formal training in order to work with complex social problems. From 1905, the Settlement collaborated with the newly created University of Birmingham to establish a series of social studies workshops and, in 1908, established the city's first social work qualification.

Over 100 years later, these programmes are still thriving, and remain central to the University's civic mission – Birmingham has the longest-running social work course in the country. Currently second in *The Complete University Guide*, social work at Birmingham has recently had two high-profile annual visits from the Health and Care Professions Council (which approves all social work training), passing with flying colours, and received significant praise from the Council and from local authority partners. More recently, Birmingham has won the educational component of the regional 'Step Up to Social Work' programme – the only Russell Group University to run an employer-led route into social work alongside the current BA/MA.

In 2015, Birmingham students and graduates dominated the national 'Social Worker of the Year' awards. Birmingham's success here is nothing new. In 2014 alumna Joanne Lowe was successful in winning the 'Adult Social Worker of the Year' award. Joanne graduated from the University in 2013 from the Social Work Post Qualifying programmes and now works for Birmingham City Council. In 2013, Amanda Beaufoy, a recent Birmingham graduate, was awarded the accolade of 'Children's Social Worker of the Year'. Amanda went on to win the University's prestigious 'Alumna of the Year 2014', and the judges commended her on her communication skills as she is profoundly deaf.

For a brief overview of social work at Birmingham, see Davis, A. (2008) *Celebrating 100 years of social work*, University of Birmingham www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/100-years-of-social-work.pdf

In 2015, winners included:

- Harprit Rai, Adult Social Worker of the Year (currently studying the Stage 1 Enabling Others Postqualifying Social Work programme)
- Tonia Dubidat, Student Social Worker of the Year (graduated with an MA, December 2015)
- Elizabeth Spencer, Newly Qualified Adult Social Worker of the Year (graduated with a BA in Social Work, 2014)

Also in 2015, silver awards were won by:

- Patricia Stubbs, Adult Social Worker of the Year (currently studying for a PGDip Social Work, Adults)
- Shabnam Sharif, Mental Health Social Worker of the Year (graduated with BA Applied Social Sciences, 2002)
- John Dhamrait, Team Leader of the Year – Adult Services (graduated with a postgraduate qualification in Leadership and Management, 2011)
- Val Thompson, Lifetime Achievement award (studied Social Services Management at the University)

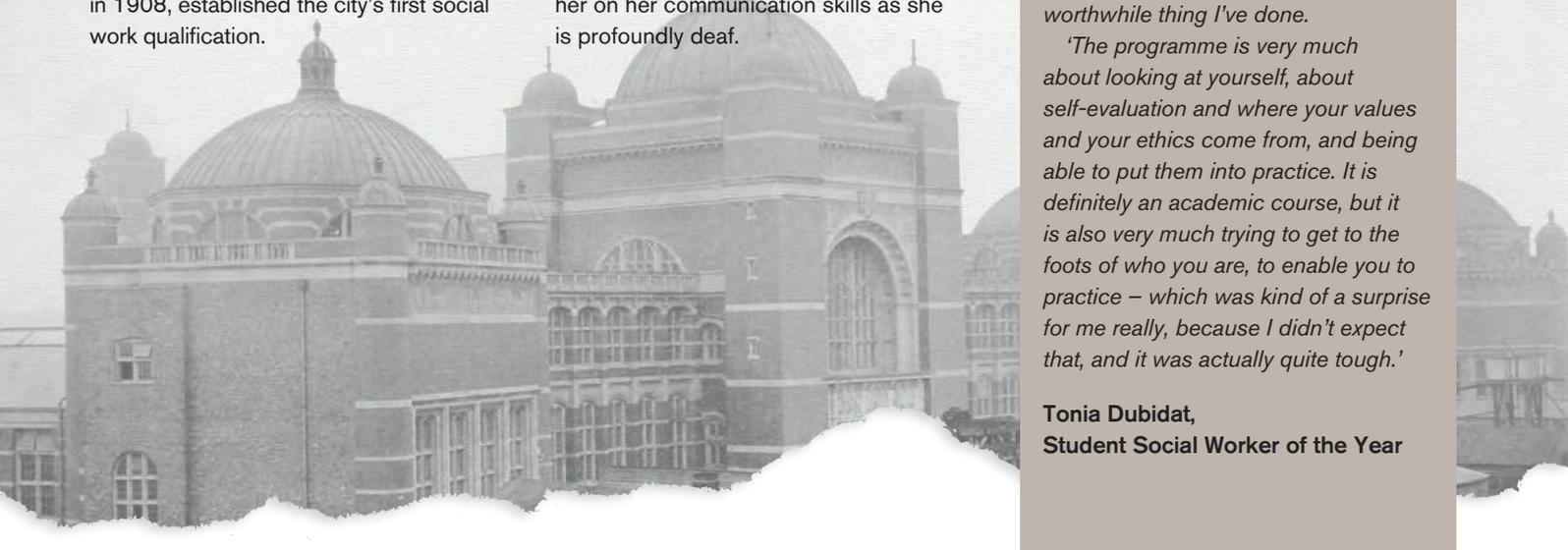
The award for Outstanding Contribution to the Social Work Sector went to Bob and Annette Holman. Bob worked at the University in the 1960s and has recently received a University of Birmingham honorary degree.

Although much has changed since the days of the *Peaky Blinders*, social needs in the city and beyond remain significant – and Birmingham continues to play a leading national role.

'It's the most challenging, but most worthwhile thing I've done.

'The programme is very much about looking at yourself, about self-evaluation and where your values and your ethics come from, and being able to put them into practice. It is definitely an academic course, but it is also very much trying to get to the roots of who you are, to enable you to practice – which was kind of a surprise for me really, because I didn't expect that, and it was actually quite tough.'

Tonia Dubidat,
Student Social Worker of the Year





STUDENT
SERVICES
WELLBEING

Supporting student wellbeing



Dr David Mair is Head of Counselling and Wellbeing at the University of Birmingham. He leads a team of counsellors at the University who offer time-limited therapy to students encountering difficulties that affect their studies and their development as emerging adults. *Buzz* caught up with him about the counselling service and the support it offers.

Year-on-year, the number of students seeking support for emotional and mental health problems from university counselling services is on the increase. A recent survey suggests that over the last decade some university counselling services have seen a rise of over 200% in students registering for help.

Dr David Mair asks: 'So what exactly is going on? Are students becoming less resilient, as some have suggested? Or are they simply overwhelmed by the pressures life throws at them now, with impossible expectations of success and achievement across all spheres? Conversely, are young people in general much more willing to talk about problems and seek support than they were, say, ten years ago?'

Here at Birmingham, the number of students seeking counselling and wellbeing support has risen steadily and gradually over the years. Around 1,000 students are seen for individual support, and another 300–400 students attend support groups and workshops.

According to David, this has shaped the nature of support. 'Due to this demand, our provision has, over time, shifted from open-ended ongoing support to more focused, time-conscious intervention; this is reflected in services nationally. Educational engagement is a key consideration in all our work.'

Surprisingly, perhaps, satisfaction levels in students who use university counselling services – including our own University's – remains high. Although, at the same time, many students feel that they have had to wait too long for an initial appointment.

David argues that timely support is essential:

'We work hard to prioritise students according to their level of distress and point of study, while being conscious that a wait can be hard when emotional distress is high. One way in which we seek to engage students more quickly is by offering a post-assessment skills-based "Developing Emotional Wellbeing" course. The course consists of two workshops that aim to help students develop an understanding of how difficult emotions arise, and the kinds of thinking that can exacerbate them and keep them going. We seek to help students try out different ways of approaching difficult emotions and thoughts, encouraging them to experiment with approaching these feelings, rather than simply trying to avoid them. We also run a very popular "Mindfulness and Self-Compassion" group which has been running for over a year. It attracts good feedback and high attendance.'

In order to deliver a quality service, practitioners need to be well in themselves, and to be as free from stress as is possible, in order to adequately focus on the needs of their clients; 'yet, with such high demand on services, the ability to think and reflect on the work we do becomes an ever-more scarce luxury. We must step back from the sometimes overwhelming stories we hear on a daily basis. We need to hold on to a sense of what we are doing as a profession, and emerging trends, so that we can best meet the needs of today's emerging adult,' explains David.

This is recognised in the requirements of the British Association for Counselling

and Psychotherapy – the requirement that all practitioners undergo a minimum of 30 hours Continuing Professional Development each year. 'Without this, our work becomes formulaic rather than being responsive to the individual needs of each person we encounter on their journey through higher education.'

According to David, the number of students seeking help will undoubtedly continue to increase, creating additional pressures and the need to adapt: 'Whatever the challenges, the counselling and wellbeing team at the University remains committed to providing a professional, compassionate and effective service to the whole student community.'

Visit <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/student-hub> for more information.

Several members of staff at the University's counselling team have invested a significant amount of time in producing a new book for counsellors working in higher education. 'Short-term Counselling in Higher Education: Context, Theory and Practice' has been edited by David Mair, with chapters contributed by Jo Ames, Sue Anderson and Dorothy Loudon. It explores online counselling provision and working with somatised distress in students – all within the context of short-term, focused work. Other contributors explore the often misunderstood notion of 'duty of care', the theoretical framework that underpins very short-term counselling interventions, working with international students, and the issue of self-care.

Meet the RESEARCH PLANNING TEAM

The University's Research Planning Team was born out of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission, which for the first time put emphasis on the impact of academic research.

To build on Birmingham's performance – 87 per cent of its research was hailed as having a global impact – the team recently more than doubled in size, to nine, as preparations get under way for REF2020. The team's remit also includes helping to meet the growing demands for 'open research' and public engagement with research.

Headed by Elizabeth Westlake, the Aston Webb-based staff work closely with academic and professional services colleagues across campus to identify, showcase and evaluate the best of Birmingham's world-leading research.



Emily Hargreaves, Research Planning Partner for Arts and Social Sciences

One of the longest-standing members of the team, Emily has been in her role for more than four years, the first two of which were focused on putting together REF2014.

'One moment I might be talking to someone about a performance they're working on to educate schoolchildren about climate change; the next I could be speaking to someone involved with international conflict resolution. Another aspect of the job I love is seeing researchers who have been carrying out amazing work for many years without recognition who are now being given the reward and acknowledgment they deserve for the changes they are making.'



Ronni Littlewood, Research Planning Partner for MDS and LES

Ronni joined the team last September from the University of Warwick, where she worked in research development and impact. She has worked in the Higher Education sector since 2001.

'I specifically look at opportunities where we can develop good impact case studies, but also provide broader support for increasing awareness, developing skills and understanding how we can draw on the support of the University to make the most of potential impact opportunities. I don't think it's all about the REF; it's being able to understand the bigger picture – how research might make a significant contribution to knowledge and, in turn, contribute to addressing societal challenges.'



Dr Lorna Hards, Research Planning Officer for Arts and Social Sciences

Lorna came to Birmingham in 2007 to do a PhD at the city's School of Art and then worked on its REF submission. After working on a year-long research project at Glasgow School of Art, she joined the team last October.

'I support impact at whatever stage it's at. I also work with the impact acceleration account (ESRC), of which I'm acting manager, to offer academics doing social science research the chance to apply for an award to develop the impact of their work. That's a real pleasure because it enables researchers at all stages of their careers and working on projects of all scales to move towards impact in a way they might not have done before.'



Dr Jo Croudace, Research Planning Officer for Impact for MDS and LES

Jo has been at the University for nearly 12 years. She did her Masters and PhD in IBR and then moved to Cancer Sciences where she worked in bone marrow transplant research.

'This job enables me to use my research expertise to support other researchers. I feel I'm still contributing to the development and outcomes of research – just working with others rather than on my own project. It's something fresh and new for me, but still linked to my background and interests.'





Dr Elizabeth Westlake, Deputy Director

In the 20 years she's been at the University, Elizabeth has worked on every RAE/REF submission. In 2014 she was also one of three panel advisers to REF Main Panel D.

'I'm a bit of a REF junkie! But this job provides a real sense of pride and satisfaction in seeing what the academic community is doing: the extent, diversity and groundbreaking ideas are just so good and so exciting. I know a lot of people think REF is a hassle, but being able to say to the outside world, "look at this; this is really good" is, I feel, incredibly important.'



Dr Gavin McNeen, Research Planning Officer for EPS

Before joining the team last December, Gavin was a researcher in Cancer Sciences, working on hypoxia and metabolism.

'I support the academics in trying to get the best impact from their research.

With EPS it's mostly industry-facing, so it's very much to do with the commercialisation of science.

'I went into science because I wanted to make a difference. I really enjoyed it, but basic research is usually at the beginning of the process and I wanted to be doing a job that was actually helping to make that difference.'

Dr Caroline Gillett, Public Engagement with Research Officer

Before joining the team last August, Caroline was the University's Public Engagement Coordinator. She also studied here: she was an undergraduate, Masters and PhD student in the School of Psychology.

'The one-year grant from the RCUK Catalyst Seed Fund – given to ten universities – that funds my post is aimed at

creating momentum around public engagement culture change, focusing on training and workshops for our researchers. I'm also working on a project to create public engagement leaders. Aimed at mid-career researchers, these academics will become champions for their colleges ensuring public engagement is recognized as a credible pathway to impact.'



Karen Clews, Pure Manager

Karen has held various roles since joining the University in 2008, and has worked on Pure since 2011. After a nine-month break in 2014, she took up her current post in May last year.

'I manage Pure, a research information system, promoting its use strategically within colleges to support processes such as the REF and Open Research requirements. I love the variety the role offers, especially contributing to new and developing areas such as Open Research. Currently I am working with colleagues across Professional Services and the colleges to understand how we can use research metrics to support the work we are doing. It's not about measuring performance; it's using metrics to help individuals make the most of their research.'



Elizabeth Lynch, Research Planning Assistant and PA to Elizabeth Westlake

Elizabeth has been at the University for nearly eight years, working within the Planning Office in various different roles.

'At the moment, half my role is supporting Emily on the ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, and the other half is being PA to Elizabeth and working with Karen on Pure.

What I like is that my role is different all the time and that as the team has got bigger I've been given more opportunity to do new things. It's quite exciting to be involved as the new team gets embedded.'

Widening participation



At a College of Medical and Dental Sciences (MDS) Undergraduate Open Day, one mother asked Professor Kate Thomas: **'How do you justify accepting students with lower grades than you would from my son for whom we've scrimped and saved to put through independent school?'**

Kate replied that she understood the financial commitment the parents had made, but added: *'Your son is now getting the benefit of that private education; the people we're helping are a million years from having such an opportunity. We are not giving them a leg up – we are levelling the playing field.'*

Kate, Programme Director for Medicine, Dr Clare Ray, MDS Outreach Lead, and the University's Central Outreach Team, led by Gail Rothnie, are passionate about helping bright, motivated but less advantaged youngsters gain places on healthcare degree courses at top universities such as Birmingham.

Through the University's Widening Access to Medicine Outreach initiative, a suite of schemes provides opportunities for would-be students as young as 14 from under-represented groups to take the first step towards rewarding medical careers.

In partnership with schools, a range of Outreach activities, together with an alternative A level offer provide a comprehensive programme of help, support and encouragement that some youngsters otherwise might not get.

'Traditionally, Medicine has had a high intake from independent schools and the middle classes, but it's long been recognised that we need doctors who represent society,' explains Kate. *'That means there needs to be diversity in terms of socio-economic background and*

ethnicity, so that patients are able to see someone who understands their life, cultural and religious obligations at the same time as being their doctor.'

Birmingham is at the forefront of widening access – its flagship scheme, Access to Birmingham (A2B), has been widely emulated. From modest beginnings 13 years ago, the number of home intake students from the two lowest socio-economic groups joining the five-year MBChB programme through A2B, Routes to Professions (R2P) and other initiatives now accounts for an impressive 17 per cent.

'It started off fairly small – two or three A2B students a year – but then came a Social Policy Commission report, which identified Law and Medicine as two professions that had failed to diversify, but mentioned the University of Birmingham as being the only academic institution that had made progress towards bringing about change – and that really spurred us on.'

In 2013, the University Outreach Team established the R2P scheme, which helps students to develop non-academic skills and capabilities which are important for the medical profession, and supports them in preparing to apply for Medicine. Clare was appointed MDS Outreach Lead to work alongside Shaheen Barkat, R2P Outreach Officer.

Says Kate: *'For all of us – me, Gail, Clare and Admissions Tutor for Medicine*

Dr Austen Spruce – it's a social justice thing; we feel very strongly about it. That's part of the reason it's been successful. 'We are not positively discriminating in an airy-fairy way; if you come from a home where nobody has had a tertiary education and you're at a school where there's less tradition of pupils going to university, then your opportunities are naturally curtailed. But if you're above average in such an environment, then in effect you're better than someone who's doing quite well in a more advantageous environment. Those are the young people we want to help.'

The University's commitment is well-placed; although they don't receive extra academic support once they're here, A2B, R2P and Academic Enrichment Programme students do as well as other medical undergraduates and the drop-out rate is lower.

'They also tend to be more independent learners, because they've had to be, and they really contribute to the life of the University,' says Clare. *'As they go forward in their careers, their success will help to widen access to medicine still further.'* Kate adds: *'There really aren't any downsides. We haven't taken on people who aren't capable, raised their expectations and then let them down; we have every confidence that they are going to have the same opportunities as anyone else with a degree in Medicine.'*



Iqra Arif

Iqra Arif's mother always wanted her to go into medicine. She would say, *'There has to be a doctor in the family'*, Iqra remembers with a smile.

Although no one in her immediate family has been to university, she is fulfilling her mum's dream. Iqra is now in her fourth year of a medical degree at Birmingham and hopes to go into emergency medicine when she graduates.

'I heard about A2B when I was at Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College,' says the 21-year-old, who grew up in the Sparkhill area of Birmingham. 'I wasn't sure I would get the grades to study medicine, so I thought about teaching, which I really love, but after I did work experience in a care home and at a GP surgery, I knew that medicine was the way I wanted to go.'

'A lot of young people have parents who can help them with the application process, as they've been to university themselves, but I didn't have that. The guidance I received from the A2B coordinator at college was invaluable. Without it, I don't think I would have succeeded in getting on to a medical degree course. It's very hard work, but I'm very glad I did.'

Two students to benefit from the A2B programme are...



Liam Barrett

Studying for A levels or the International Baccalaureate Diploma is hard enough; harder still when your peers are not as like-minded in pushing themselves to achieve. But Liam Barrett stayed focused and determined and, supported by the A2B scheme, did well enough to get on to a Medicine degree course at Birmingham – and win an A2B scholarship.

The 22-year-old from Stechford hasn't looked back. Not only has he excelled at his studies; he has also taken part in MDS Outreach activities, *'to give something back'*, and worked overseas with the charity Global Medical Brigades.

Liam, the first generation of his family to go to university, is still in contact with MDS Outreach Lead Dr Clare Ray. *'The extra help I received through A2B was invaluable, and I still have those links. To have someone by your side throughout your degree is very comforting.'*

Now in his fourth year, Liam – who hopes to work in A&E – says he has never felt at a disadvantage. *'I felt I was on a level playing from the start. It's tough, because it is hard work, but I now have a lot more confidence in my abilities. I've proved that you can achieve anything if you put your mind to it.'*



Both Professor Kate Thomas and an A2B graduate, Dr Shayan Ahmed, feature in the new Birmingham Heroes campaign. They appear together on posters sited around campus and beyond – including at Birmingham International railway station – alongside fellow Medical Heroes Dr Rima Dhillon and Dr Joe Alderman.

'Although I am slightly embarrassed at being named a Birmingham Hero, I am also really pleased that the campaign is raising Medicine's profile,' says Kate. 'In the last couple of years, we have improved our NSS score and done some innovative things, so I'm happy that's been recognised. What really delights me is that two of the Medical Heroes are recent students – and one of them is Shayan, who was inspired to study medicine at Birmingham when he attended our Academic Enrichment Programme organised by the Outreach Office ten years ago.'

'The reason I do this job is for the students. If someone had asked me who I wanted to be on a poster with, I would have said 'the students', so I think that's rather lovely.'

CAMPUS CURIOSITIES



Chancellor's column

Midlands takes a bow

In December 2015, Adam Tickell, our Provost and I accompanied Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Business, and Jo Johnson, Universities Minister on a visit to India. The delegation also included the Vice Chancellors of the Universities of Warwick and Leicester. I am delighted that the University of Birmingham is now set to play an important role in a government-led initiative to make the Midlands one of the most productive parts of the British economy.

The Midlands Engine prospectus was launched in New Delhi by the Business Secretary Sajid Javid at an event hosted by the Director of the Federation of Indian Commerce and Industry, Dr Didar Singh (a proud University of Birmingham alumnus), which I was privileged to Chair. According to this prospectus, the Midlands is home to world-class universities and internationally renowned manufacturers and is capable of being a powerhouse for industry and research, with our University at the heart of that strategy.

Birmingham – home of Bournville, where Cadbury's is still made to this day, and home of the largest collection of Pre-Raphaelite artworks in the world, and also our very own Barber Institute – has many facets that attract interest from the world. It deserves to be nothing less than the heart of the UK economy.



What is it?

A Tuareg arm dagger and scabbard

Where is it?

Danford Room, Arts Building

(viewable by appointment; please email rcc@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

The dagger and scabbard were made in the early 1970s and are part of the Danford Collection. They were made by the nomadic Tuareg people, specifically the Kel Adar who live in the highlands of Mali. Much of their craft production is in the form of saddle decoration, bags, clothing and weaponry.

The arm dagger (or telek) is designed with an armband on the sheath. It is traditionally worn on the inside of the left arm with the handle facing downward, allowing for quick unsheathing during battle. Historically the Tuareg are respected warriors in terms of both their skill in battle and production of weapons. The dagger's handle is made of wood decorated with metal and plastic, and the blade is fashioned from a Land Rover leaf-spring. The scabbard is decorated in applied black, red and green leather with brass and tin plate or aluminium.

Learn more

A number of Tuareg objects from the Danford Collection will be on display for the exhibition *Empires of Emptiness: Fortresses of the Sahara and the Steppe* (15 February – 15 May in the Rotunda, Aston Webb Building). Please see <http://rcc-redmarely.tumblr.com> for a blog post about the exhibition.

You can also visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/rcc to find out more about the Danford Collection.

Congratulations!

In November 2015, Carl Hingley from EPS was presented with a British Empire Medal (BEM) by Dr John Craggs DL, Deputy Lieutenant of West Midlands, for his services to Mechanical Engineering.

The Ceremony took place in the Senate Chamber, and was attended by the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood, PVC and Head of College, Professor Andy Schofield, the new Head of School, Professor Duncan Shepherd, former Head of School, Professor Duc Pham, and a number of Carl's family, friends, and colleagues.



Carl Hingley and Deputy Lieutenant, Dr John Craggs

Carl has worked for the University for over 30 years and is the Senior Technician for Mechanical Engineering. He works in the Future Power Systems group, and is Manager of the University of Birmingham Formula Student Racing Team.



news+views

Our regular feature gives *Buzz* readers a quick tour of the latest University news hitting the headlines and activity among our online community.

If you would like to work with the press office, or find out more about how they can help you promote your research, email pressoffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk or call 0121 414 6029

in the news...

Many articles about Birmingham research and expertise appear in local, national and international press every day. Here are just a few examples of our recent highlights.

Our knowledge of future technologies was highlighted in December; Professor David Dunn was interviewed for a feature on Sky News, discussing the security implications of readily-available drones, Dr Nick Hawes spoke to CNN about artificial intelligence based robots, and Professor Bob Stone was quoted in *The Sunday Telegraph* on the rise of virtual reality.

Professor Mike Cruise attended the launch of the first UK astronaut to the International Space Station. He was interviewed by the BBC's David Shukman about the scientific projects that Tim Peake will be tasked with. Mike also spoke to BBC News about the launch of LISA Pathfinder. As the world celebrated the centenary of Einstein's theory of general relativity, Professor Alberto Vecchio was interviewed for BBC Radio 4's *Today Programme* about the ongoing hunt for gravitational waves.

Our scientists were in high demand, as Professor Dave Charlton was interviewed by *Nature* on suggestions of a new heavy boson particle being found at the Large Hadron Collider, Professor Yulong Ding was filmed for BBC West Midlands on the cryogenic energy for storage facility housed on campus, and Professor Roy Harrison talked to BBC World News about the dangers of the particles that car exhausts release.

Dr Anna Phillips' research that found levels of antibodies in saliva to be associated with risk of mortality was covered in *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *Daily Mail* and a number of leading outlets across the globe.

Research by Dr Stephane De Brito and Dr Jack Rogers highlighting a reduced grey matter volume in the brains of youths with behavioural problems was covered by the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*, *El Mundo* and ABC News.

It has been a busy few months for our public intellectuals; Dr Nando Sigona was quoted in the *Guardian* on the stateless populations of Europe, Professor Scott Lucas was interviewed on BBC Radio 4's *PM programme* about *Star Wars* and the US political climate of the 1970s, and Professor Isabelle Szmigin spoke to BBC about the importance of branding decisions in the medical industry.

Join the UoB online community

Follow us on Twitter at [@unibirmingham](https://twitter.com/unibirmingham). If you use social media at work and would like to increase your visibility, find out more at: intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/socialmediaguidelines



feeling social...

For our final graduation ceremonies of 2015, we asked graduating students to share the 'one word' they thought best described their time at the University. The digital team went on campus to chat with students and asked them to write their 'one word' on a whiteboard for our social channels.

The images were then used to engage with potential students – to give them an idea of what to expect at Birmingham, and to offer a glimpse of how they too could be graduating having these same experiences!

The photos were used on a Facebook gallery, and were also shared on the University's Twitter and LinkedIn accounts. To create engagement around the project, we encouraged fans and followers to share what their 'one word' would be. It was a great way for current students who graduated to share their memories with those who are just starting out on the journey.

Tim Softley... in my own words

Professor Tim Softley is the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer.



I joined the University in September 2015 from the University of Oxford, where I read Chemistry as an undergraduate, and where I later worked for 25 years – most recently as Head of Chemistry.

My childhood was spent in Norwich, where I lived for the first 18 years of my life. After my undergraduate studies, I went to Southampton to complete a PhD in Physical Chemistry. This was followed by a Harkness post-doctoral Fellowship at Stanford University in California. One of the nice things about the Fellowship was the opportunity to spend two-months travelling around the United States – a requirement of the Fellowship, of course. Upon returning to the UK I went to Cambridge as a Royal Society Research Fellow, setting up my own independent research before moving to Oxford in 1990. The current focus of my research is on chemical reactions at extremely low temperatures.

After 25 years at Oxford, where I got to enjoy several leadership roles in a world-leading university, the University of Birmingham presented an exciting new challenge and opportunity for me. It struck me as an impressive place to come with its bold-vision for the future, and I must say I have very much enjoyed my first few months here.

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that we are placed firmly among the elite of UK research universities. I believe we can achieve a step-change in our research performance – not only through improving key measures, but also by creating a true sense of excitement about our research: ultimately I want people to view the University of Birmingham as ‘the place to be’. We’ve made great progress, but I believe we can do even better in REF 2020 by enhancing our intellectual environment through creating a vibrant and supportive research culture that encourages creativity, confidence and ambition in every corner of the University, while recognising, rewarding and enabling world-class researchers.

I look around and see things that are ‘uniquely-Birmingham’, our museum collections, our presence in the region and our ability to deliver full-circle translational medicine. We can leverage these to our advantage, and strengthen our reputation by showcasing our impact inside and outside academia, locally, nationally and internationally. By supporting our academics to engage with our community, we

can demonstrate the purposefulness of our research and the value of our contribution.

The new Strategic Framework emphasises our resolve to further our influence and impact. We are very well placed as such a broad university to address the major challenges of our day – for example; the whole realm of security, environment, sustainable energy and energy storage, health challenges, poverty, quality of life and of education. Across the University there are experts who are at the forefront of tackling these issues globally – it is indeed our breadth of expertise that positions us so well to make real change happen. However, we must always make room for blue-skies, discovery-led research, because, as lessons from history teach us, this can often lead to something unexpected. It is blue-skies research that can often pose the questions, rather than necessarily trying to answer them.

To enable more world-leading research, we inevitably have to look at developing and diversifying sources of income, including building stronger collaborations with industry and business. I believe that university research can make a real contribution to innovation and national productivity by working collaboratively. To achieve this without compromising academic excellence, we have to be smart and address the right problems – problems which are intellectually challenging and of interest, but ones that deliver mutual benefits.

Academia has been a constant throughout my whole life and I’m continually excited by how universities re-create themselves with new ideas and new people. The University of Birmingham is a trailblazer in that regard; it has strong vision and leadership and wants to be a leader and an innovator. But what has struck me most is the inspiring people I’ve met working in our schools and colleges, who have such pride, drive and determination to take the University forward. I’m also inspired by the green views from the top of the Muirhead tower...

The whole city of Birmingham is a great place to be – very upwardly-mobile with a wealth of diversity, culture and heritage, which is great for me as an enthusiast of classical music, red wine and sport. On that note I must confess my lifelong support for Norwich City Football Club. I am now perfectly located to attend many away fixtures, so I expect I may well bump in to many of you at matches across the city. Whatever your colours, the city, like the University, has much to be proud of.