Faith in the City

December/January 2011/12

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

REF2014
Meet the team
Antibiotic Action
Birmingham: Winning the race

Observer visits to my office will notice my interest in motor racing. Currently there’s a die-cast replica of Sebastian Vettel’s 2010 Championship-winning car next to a photograph of the almost-as-distinguished UoB Formula Student car of the same year.

Explaining my passion for Formula One often seems to surprise people. ‘Aren’t the races boring?’ ‘There’s too little overtaking’. The same guys usually win.’ ‘We’ll come back to this last criticism later, but the rest miss the point.

A Formula One race is like a great novel. It unfolds over time, at many different levels. There’s the main plot (who will win), myriad sub-plots, and always too much to take in without reflecting on the race and savouring the action. Truly a race is a grand narrative. Moreover the more you know about teams, tactics, the engineering and design of the car, and the characteristics of different tracks, the more you will relish the action. It’s a sport that repays those who read, those who prepare to watch a race, and, indeed, those who have a sense of its history and drama. In short, it’s a great sport for an academic.

But is it a sport on which you might build a university strategy? Well, yes you might. Take this season’s champions Red Bull. This is a team that has come from nowhere over six years. Aficionados of Birmingham from the demise of the distinguished UoB Formula Student car to the arrival of Ross Brawn who led the project from nowhere over six years.

And in 2009, and now it has won two world championship titles, in a sport where no one thought that the great teams with their superior resources would be displaced. Red Bull have achieved their success with a remarkable blend of technical brilliance, engineering excellence, organisational flair, the right facilities at Milton Keynes, nurturing talent (through Toto Rosso), and a brilliant driver. They have invested in what matters, driven the strategy with unrelenting belief, and invested both in proven talent (Adrian Newey) and youthful brilliance (Seb Vettel).

And so if Red Bull were a university what would they have done? They would have identified the resources to invest (like Birmingham); they would have had best-in-class facilities (like Birmingham is committed to providing); they would have recognised the importance of research (like Birmingham); they searched out established talent (like Birmingham’s being open for business); they would have sought to get the best of the next generation (like the Birmingham Fellows); and they would have had the best people on the pit-wall and in the factory back at Milton Keynes (as Birmingham is through ensuring we model excellence in all services in the University).

Red Bull also demonstrates the importance of working as a team, however brilliant the individuals, and the importance of leadership not just at the top of the team but across the team as a whole. There are lessons for us in Red Bull’s success.

‘Ah!’ I hear you saying. ‘The University of Birmingham is not like Red Bull. They are the new kid on the block who has forced their way to an ascendency by their novelty, by doing things differently, and by not being encumbered by the weight of history’. They are, if you like, a Warwick or a York when they took off in the 1970s.

In part that would be to miss the point. The model works, and when the model works competitors need to respond and to adapt – ask McLaren and Mercedes. We, too, constantly face the imperative to adapt to the competition, to be nimble in the ways in which smaller institutions can be nimble, and to combine the resources that we genuinely have with equal imagination and brilliance.

But if we accept that, as a University, we haven’t always achieved our potential and that sometimes we have measured ourselves against a standard which is unattainable, we then might look to the history of Ferrari. There is no more illustrious name in Formula One, and no team that has resources on its scale. A great tradition, a great factory, and everything you could want, right down to Ferrari’s own test track. Sounds like what we have here in Edgbaston.

Yet after Jody Scheckter won the Championship in 1979 Ferrari entered a long period where performance languished. There were flashes of brilliance, but the team never hit the heights, and even hiring brilliant drivers (Mansell and Prost) didn’t turn Ferrari around. What did account for Ferrari’s fall? Too much focus, prioritised investment, notably with the arrival of Ross Brawn who led the team’s engineering and tactics, and the virtuosity of Michael Schumacher.

Even with the right elements in place, the revival took time. They won the constructors’ championship in 1999, and would have won the drivers’ championship had Schumacher not broken his leg. The drought of world drivers’ championships didn’t end until 2000. Then success was unrelenting, winning five drivers’ championships in succession. Success truly breeds success.

The moral of the Ferrari story is twofold. Sleeping giants can be awakened, and when they are they are fearsome. Secondly, the recipe for success for new teams and for reviving teams is much the same. The right strategy, the right people, the right investment, teamwork, patience, and celebration of success when it comes.

Put like this, success in Formula One has much to teach us in universities. It also tells us at Birmingham that we are on our way.

We are assembling the right elements, and we have resources and a history that our competitors truly envy. We are starting to win races and, I believe, sustained success is within our grasp.

Oh yes, and the charge that Formula One’s boring because the same guys win all the time? Well, actually, over time they don’t, but the sport does reward the best, as great sports should. It’s much the same in universities – ask them at Harvard and Oxford. But things do change. Stanford was once an also-ran, now it’s competing for pole position.

And anyway, as we achieve our ambitions and then keep winning, I for one won’t mind.

Queen’s Anniversary Prize success

Congratulations to the University’s world leading Centre for Formulation Engineering who have been awarded the Queen’s Anniversary Prize for Higher and Further Education. This is the second time that the University has received the Queen’s Anniversary Prize, which is perhaps the most prestigious honour that can be awarded to UK universities or colleges. This award recognises our pioneering research in micro-structured materials and outstanding track record in collaborative research and training with UK and multinational companies involved in process engineering. The team in the Centre for Formulation Engineering is led by Professor Peter Fryer, Head of the School of Chemical Engineering.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the Centre please visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/chemical-engineering/index.aspx.

Shout about your success!

Have you received an award or honorary doctorate? Have you won a prize or been commended for your work? Or know a colleague who has?

Then let us know! We will list online and share on Twitter and Facebook.

Read the latest achievements from colleagues across the University on our staff achievements page www.newcentre.bham.ac.uk/zzz/achievements.shtml

Contd from page 2

Birmingham achieves HR Excellence in Research Award

Birmingham was recently awarded The HR Excellence in Research Award: A European driven benchmark which acknowledges how the University manages, develops and supports its research staff. This Award, from the European Commission, incorporates both the QAA Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. There are 23 UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with the award, including Bristol, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Exeter, Leeds and Newcastle.

Receiving the Award reflects Birmingham’s commitment to researcher development, key to achieving our strategic goals, particularly to:

# enhance our research power;
# become a research led university;
# and the destination of choice for both staff and students.

Supported by the University’s Research and Human Resource strategies it provides a positive platform for further enhancement and development of our researcher community.

Learn more about the award and access useful research career development resources at www.hr.bham.ac.uk/development/guides/HRConcordat.shtml and www.vtae.ac.uk
CELEBRATING SUCCESS

The fifth annual ‘Awards for Excellence in Teaching or Supporting Students’ Learning’ were held on 11 October. The Vice-Chancellor hosted a drinks reception and dinner at Hornton Grange to congratulate those who had been chosen by their Schools and Colleges as recipients of this year’s awards.

One of the University’s strategic aims is to provide our students with a distinctive and high quality educational experience. These awards recognise the excellent work carried out by staff who teach, and support the learning of our students, and make a real contribution to the educational aspirations of our University. Each School was invited to nominate an individual or team for their commitment to continuously improving the quality of our students’ learning experience, and both teaching and support staff were eligible for awards. Congratulations to all of our winners:

**College of Arts and Law**
- Professor Steve Ellis, Director of Education
- Lisa Anderson, Birmingham Law School
- Dr Clare Barker, School of English, Drama and American & Canadian Studies
- Dr Simone Laqua-O’Donnell, School of History and Cultures
- Dr David Smith, Institute of Archaeology and Antiquity
- Xiaolong Tang, School of Languages, Cultures, Art History and Music
- Dr Isabel Wollaston, School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion

**College of Engineering and Physical Sciences**
- Dr John Wilke and Dr Sarah Horwell, School of Chemistry
- Janet Roberts and Sarah Williams, School of Civil Engineering
- Dr Nicholas Hawes, School of Computer Science
- Dr Peter Janovic and Dr Stuart Hilmansen, School of Electronic, Electrical and Computing Engineering
- Dr Susana Gutierrez, School of Mathematics
- Michael Ward, School of Mechanical Engineering
- Dr Isaac Chang, School of Metallurgy and Materials
- Lynne Long, School of Physics and Astronomy

**College of Life and Environmental Sciences**
- Dr Peter Lund, School of Biosciences
- Dr Peter Lund, School of Biosciences
- Ian Phillips, School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Ian Mitchell, School of Psychology
- Dr George Balanos, School of Sport and Exercise Sciences

**College of Medical and Dental Sciences**
- Dr Jamie Colman, School of Clinical and Experimental Medicine
- Sudha Sundar, School of Cancer Sciences
- Dr Jamie Colman, School of Clinical and Experimental Medicine
- Glyn Thomas and Martyn Baylis, School of Dentistry
- Dr Connie Wiskin, School of Health and Population Sciences
- Professor Janet Lord, School of Immunity and Infection

**College of Social Sciences**
- Emma Foster, School of Government and Society
- Dr Caroline Moraes, Birmingham Business School
- Elizabeth Hodges, School of Education
- Emma Foster, School of Government and Society
- Tina Heam, Gary Hickman and Alison Paris, School of Social Policy

The Registrar’s Leadership Group (RLG) is investing £30,000 in a ‘Good Ideas Fund’ to encourage practical and constructive ideas from across the Professional Services that will improve services that the administration in both the Centre and the Colleges provide.

Any individual or team from anywhere in the Professional Services can submit an idea. Bids can be from £200 to £2,500 and should be influenced by any of the five strategic goals set out in the Strategic Framework. Ideas should improve the processes, practices, policies or systems that we deliver that contribute to:
- enhancing the impact of our research;
- enhancing student experience;
- tackling bottlenecks in the University;
- delivering a money-saving idea to help sustain our financial position;
- being the destination of choice amongst our peers.

Bids will be assessed on their creativity and effectiveness. Bids that are demonstrably ‘matched’ in some way will be given priority. Bids are due by 16 January 2011 to goodideas@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

A panel of RLG members will select a shortlist and final decisions will be made by a panel including a student and an early career professional.

For more details and to download the application form, please visit www.intranet.bham.ac.uk/staff/goodideas.shtml.
As part of the ESRC’s Festival of Social Science 2011, I organised the Faith in the City: communities, regeneration, interaction event here in Birmingham. Held in the city, at the local Green Lane mosque, the event sought to explore how faith inspires and influences people to live, work and act in today’s urban space.

Attracting around 70 delegates across the day, representatives from most of the city’s different faith communities were joined by delegates from Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Police and West Midlands Fire Service, as well as academics and students from local and national universities. Alongside presentations from Birmingham-based organisations with a faith heritage – including Islamic Relief, St Peter’s Saltley Trust and Birmingham Citizens – researchers from the University spoke about how their research was helping to raise awareness of a number of critical issues relevant to modern faith communities. Of particular interest was Dr Ricky Joseph from the Centre for Household Assets and Savings Management (CHASM) who spoke about the disparity between different faith groups in terms of wealth and assets, something that delegates had not previously considered.

There were a number of highlights to the day. The first was the keynote speech delivered by Birmingham-based graffiti artist Mohammed Ali, winner of an ITV South Bank Show Award in recognition of the best in British art. Mohammed spoke about his identity as a Muslim and how this did not detract from his British identity. Recalling how as a child, his parents used to run a take-away in Birmingham, he joked that the best evidence of him being British was that ‘fish and chips flowed in my blood’.

The event was also an opportunity to screen a short film I made about the regeneration of the Grade II listed Green Lane Mosque. Made in collaboration with the mosque’s Tassaddaq Hussain and produced by Lucy Vernall and Andy Tootell from the University’s Ideas Lab, the film explored how the Muslim community in Small Heath have, over the past decade, saved the former Victorian public baths and library from demolition, and restored and converted it to a mosque and community centre. Tassaddaq also provided a pictoral history of the building including images of how the building will look once the restoration is complete.

Given that we live in a country where Alastair Campbell once famously remarked ‘we don’t do God’, an event that looked at ‘faith’ might bemuse some. But, faith – whether one has it or not – is more important and topical today than it has been for decades. As the theology think-tank Theos recently noted, ‘religious identity is a feature of national and international affairs today in a way that was unexpected, indeed unimaginable, just twenty years ago’. Despite this, it is no less contentious or emotive today than it has ever been but what it does show is the timeliness and relevance of faith to Britain, and British people, in the 21st century.

It is easy to get bogged down in numbers – enough has been written about the potential misleading nature of the Census figures relating to religion – yet the Integrated Household Survey from earlier this year reaffirms how the majority of Britons continue to identify with a faith; three Britons identify themselves as Christian for every one that does not. Even amongst the young, 59% of 16–24 year-olds and 60% of under-16s identify themselves as being Christian.

Going beyond these, more new churches than Starbucks have opened across the UK since the turn of the century, more Britons believe in heaven today than they did in the 1970s, and the number of adult Christian baptisms is continuing to rise. Even though overall church attendance remains in decline, a third of churches are reporting growth.

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From across the political parties attended including Simon Hughes, Jack Straw, Nicholas Boles, Jeremy Corbyn, Khalid Mahmood, Roger Godsiff, Richard Burden, Louise Mensch and John Hemmings.

In addition to my evidence, I made nine recommendations to the Group. These included:

- establishing a working definition of Islamophobia;
- developing a knowledge and evidence base of Islamophobia in the UK;
- opening a consultation exercise to better understand people’s views and attitudes;
- commissioning reports from the Crown Prosecution Service into anti-Muslim hate crime and, into workplace and educational anti-Muslim discrimination, from the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

With all fingers crossed that the re-launched Group does not encounter the same turbulence, I hope to continue supporting the APPG, not least to ensure that the groundbreaking research being undertaken here at Birmingham continues to have an impact at national level.

profile

Learn more

Read the profile of Dr Chris Allen on page 20 and watch the Green Lane Mosque regeneration film http://vimeo.com/23974868
REF2014: The principles

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the new process for assessing the quality of research in UK Higher Education institutions (HEIs). The successor to the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), it is overseen by the four Higher Education Funding Councils (for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and informs research funding allocations (approximately £2 billion per year). It provides accountability for public funding of research and demonstrates its benefits to the wider public.

Who carries out the review?
The process involves peer review, whereby recognised academic experts form a judgment on the quality of the research submitted. There are four main panels, which group discipline-specific sub-panels into relevant areas (Medical and Life Sciences; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Social Sciences; Arts and Humanities). Each main panel has an academic Chair who is supported by two advisers (seconded from Higher Education institutions) with specialist knowledge in RAE/REF and research. Across these four main panels there are 36 sub-panels, made up of academics and users with relevant expertise, such as senior staff at biotech or engineering firms, representatives from libraries and museums, civil servants who make use of policy-based research. Panels are formed through a nomination process overseen by the Funding Councils.

How does it link to funding allocations?
The quality judgments made by these panels drive the allocation of research funding. It therefore allows Funding Councils to demonstrate to Government that research funding is being directed towards those institutions producing high quality research.

How is the review carried out?
Each institution will make a decision about the research it submits to REF. Each submission contains a set of information covering:

- **Staff** – who is carrying out the research
- **Outputs** – up to four examples of research activity per member of staff, carried out during the assessment period
- **Impact** – a new component of the submission requirements for REF 2014
- **Environment** – a description of the research environment in which the activity is taking place, supplemented by data about research students and income over the assessment period.

What is an ‘output’?
An output can include journal articles, books, and other artefacts such as performances and exhibitions, providing they exemplify research. The assessment period for outputs in between 1 January 2008 and 31 July 2013.

What is the ‘impact’ aspect of REF?
REF requires institutions to demonstrate the ‘impact’ of their research on wider society, outside academia. REF guidance describes impact as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.’ In reference to the case of impact, the underpinning research must have been carried out at the submitting institution between 1 January 1993 and 31 December 2013, and the impact itself must have taken place between January 2008 and 31 July 2013.

How can I find out more?
The rules for REF submission are laid out in the Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions which is available at www.refhefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/02_11. REF will be a new experience for everyone at the University and indeed in Higher Education. The details of the process are still in development and we will continue to keep you updated as information becomes available.

Learn more [www.intranet.bham.ac.uk](http://www.intranet.bham.ac.uk) or email researchperformance@contacts.bham.ac.uk

REF2014: At Birmingham

Adam Tickell, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer describes how REF will ‘impact’ Birmingham.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) represents a significant new challenge for UK universities. There are many areas of continuity between the REF and its predecessor, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and peer academics and others will judge the quality of research and assess a range of other environmental variables (such as research income and environment). The major discontinuity, however, will be that the REF will score universities for the degree to which they make an ‘impact,’ our contribution to economic competitiveness, quality of life and so on.

The results of the REF will determine our funding and strongly influence the University’s reputation over the coming years and it is imperative that we perform as strongly as possible in an environment where, in real terms, public funding for research is failing. Underlying the exercise is a government concern to ensure that more restricted funds for research are concentrated in the strongest research universities and departments, to give a practical example: HEFCE no longer provide funding for research judged as less than 3* quality by the REF. With approximately £2 billion to be allocated amongst the sector, this position creates a real risk of a shortfall in our income if we do not keep ahead of the competition.

This is also the immediate outcome and further financial consequences are anticipated from our student recruitment and ability to win grants in the medium-long term, if we are not amongst the UK’s leading research universities.

The University community should feel optimistic going into the REF. We have many academics who are amongst the international leaders of their research field. The University, unlike many of our competitors, continues to invest in research. We have invested in a range of outstanding inter-disciplinary centres, funded by the Strategic Investment Budget, are committed to supporting bids for new capital equipment, and the new Birmingham Fellows represent a significant injection of new young talent. We are attracting research grants which will allow us to continue to produce world leading ideas and in areas ranging from philosophy through to translational medicine we have an outstanding story to tell about impact. However, given the new funding environment and our disappointing result in the last RAE, the University has decided to only to submit staff to the REF if they have produced a strong range of publications (unless extenuating circumstances apply).

With over 2,300 academic staff, there are multiple stories waiting to respond to these fundamental questions of the value of our research to the wider community, beyond academia. Our focus now is on starting to compile our submission, focussing initially on preparing the impact components of the return. Please speak to your local REF leads or Director of Research if you have any questions or email us at researchperformance@contacts.bham.ac.uk. This is a vital conversation for the future of research at Birmingham; make sure your voice is heard.

Malcolm Press, Deputy Chair, Biological Sciences

The Biological Sciences sub-panel is one of the largest, with over 30 members covering the basic and applied biology of all organisms. The last year has been spent producing the working methods and assessment criteria that we will use in 2014. We have just completed this task, which was informed by a consultation exercise that attracted responses from not just universities but also from academic associations, professional and government bodies, as well as individuals.

The biggest challenge so far have been ensuring consistency in protocols across the 36 sub-panels and allowing differences only in cases where they are justifiable because of discipline-specific reasons.'
Buzz learns how REF addresses staff special circumstances.

The REF makes particular allowances for staff who are in the early stages of their career, have reduced working patterns or whose life experiences have prevented them from producing the required four outputs. These circumstances are defined in the REF Guidance on Submissions as:

1. **Clearly defined Circumstances:** This covers Early Career Researchers (ECRs), part-timers, and those who have been on secondment or taken career breaks outside academia which do not involve research. In these cases, there will be a simple tariff by which the required number of outputs may be reduced without penalty, which will be linked to the start date for ECRs, the FTE of part-time staff over the period, or the amount of time spent out of academia in relation to secondments or career breaks. This tariff was part of the recent consultation on the draft Panel Criteria and Working Methods and the final version will be published in January 2012.

2. **Complex Circumstances:** This covers disability, ill-health or injury; mental health conditions; child or other caring responsibilities; constraints related to pregnancy and maternity (in addition to maternity leave itself); gender reassignment, or other circumstances relating to the legally protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. In these cases, HEIs will need to submit a written case as part of the REF submission explaining the circumstances and make a judgement about the number of outputs to submit. The Funding Councils’ REF Equity and Diversity Panel will be issuing further guidance on this in due course.

3. **Maternity, paternity and adoption leave:** The Funding Councils have recently announced that a simple tariff for maternity leave consisting of a reduction of one output per period of maternity leave will be applied (regardless of the length of maternity leave). The Funding Councils are currently taking advice on appropriate provision in relation to paternity and adoption leave.

The University’s REF team will identify from staff records as many staff as possible who fall under the clearly defined circumstances category or who have taken maternity, paternity or adoption leave, but clearly cannot identify staff with complex circumstances. If you believe you fall into any of the above categories you are strongly encouraged, in the first instance, to contact your College Head of HR, who will advise on appropriate steps. You may also wish to discuss your position with the REF lead for your area or your Head of School.

The rigour by which the University makes its staff selection decisions lies at the heart of our approach. It is encouraging to see that the University’s draft Code of Practice \(^2\) sets out clearly how the integrity of decision making will be assured. For example, all key parties involved in the staff selection process will undertake briefings and training on the legal and equality expectations of their role, with HR and the University’s Diversity Advisor working closely with University and College groups. Furthermore the Code outlines in detail how the University will address those situations where an individual may not have the requisite number of returnable outputs due to exceptional personal circumstances. Most importantly, between now and the REF census date in 2013, individuals will have the opportunity to engage in a regular dialogue with their manager on their progress, complemented by channels available to them should they have questions or concerns about how their case is being considered.

Declan Vaughan, Assistant Director, HR Operations

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**REF 2014: Staff circumstances**

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**Strategic Planning:**

**Fit for the Future**

Director of Strategic Planning, Vicki Stott describes her team’s ‘radical new look’.

Over the past 18 months, since we began working on Shaping Our Future, the University’s Strategic Framework, there has been an increasing demand from the University’s senior management for Planning to be more involved, at a higher level, in strategic and policy-based work. This work has been varied: drafting the Institutional Key Performance Targets (KPTs); creating the MI dashboard and designing the new school performance grid; writing the proposal for new Undergraduate fees following the Browne Report; putting together the University’s new risk management framework; drafting the Access Agreement submitted to Office For Fair Access (OFFA); and working on the design of the new Vice-Chancellor’s Review process. All of this sits alongside the traditional areas we are still involved in: managing the University’s statutory returns to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), analysing the University’s league table performance; running the Research Excellence Framework (REF) process; supporting Colleges through the business partner model, and modelling student populations and fee income.

With increasingly demanding and high profile priorities it became clear that our traditional way of working: in rigid, structured teams, did not allow enough flexibility to adapt to this increasing demand. In the ever more challenging HE funding climate, it was clear that rather than increasing staff numbers, we ought first to look at ways of increasing capacity and efficiency from our existing, extremely talented, team.

And so the ‘Fit for the Future’ project was born. Agnieszka Scott, who was then Planning Partner for the College of Medical and Dental Sciences, facilitated the project, and the whole office participated, with a project board providing the overall steer.

We spent the first six weeks exploring our characteristics: looking at workload, personal characteristics (using the Belbin profile system), our confidence levels measured against the competences outlined in HR’s capability framework, skills (both soft and technical), and our aspirations.

Over the summer break, my team leaders and I articulated our mission statement, identifying four areas of priority. When the team picked up the project again after the summer, we set about looking at how we might pull together useful combinations of people and skills into each of the priority areas.

From this we designed the organisation structure overleaf, which is ‘round and flat’. All of our work is now structured into projects, with resource from appropriate rings of the structure rolling through the projects to ensure that they are assigned expertise and capacity. This has the advantage of making sure projects are able to run to time, and that people have the chance to gain experience in a variety of projects. This in turn, provides greater opportunity for individuals to learn new skills, whilst also offering the wider team resilience, by spreading expertise amongst the team members.

The new structure was launched in a final meeting on 31 October 2011. This meeting was attended by the Vice-Chancellor who welcomed our radical new look.

Over the next three months, we will be continuing to bed-in the new structure and new ways of working. We hope that this re-organisation, together with increasingly efficient technical systems, will mean that we can continue to offer the University an excellent level of service in all the areas it expects us to cover.
Also part of the Planning Office is Alison Torrens who is currently on secondment with the Russell Group. On a one year secondment, Alison is part of a team undertaking research projects to inform and publicise the Russell Group’s activities.
The University’s IT Strategy for the next five years defines the vision and overall direction of travel for the deployment and exploitation of IT capabilities across the University. The Strategy was developed in close alignment with the University’s new Strategic Framework, after consultation with staff and students from a diverse range of disciplines. It is an integral element of each of the framework’s five major goals, and will help the University deliver them.

As a leading academic institution, IT is crucial in helping Birmingham succeed in its key goals of academic research, learning and teaching. It is therefore imperative that there is a clear and progressive IT strategy which underpins these goals, with a delivery and governance which is integrated with the ongoing management of the institution. The IT Strategy aspires to deliver a step-change in the desire, capability and delivery of how it contributes across the University.

The IT Strategy is based around five themes: Advancing the University, Effective Information Stewardship, University Operational Excellence, IT Complexity Reduction and IT Functional Excellence.

**A successful strategy**

Key to success of the IT strategy is:

- having close alignment (on-going) to the wider University Strategic Framework;
- maintaining focus and drive to deliver the new and evolving capability vision, with both short-term ‘Quick Wins’ and long-term capability enhancement;
- balancing strategic initiatives with sustaining and supporting the existing portfolio of IT services;
- maintaining effective communication with the full University community about the programme, the progress and the resulting benefits delivered.

As the new facilities and services are delivered over coming months and years, further updates will be shared.

**IT Strategy Themes**

1. **Advancing the University**
   - Advancing how IT supports the three key areas of academic research, learning and teaching, and a distinctive student experience.

2. **Effective Information Stewardship**
   - Developing the systems and processes to store, provide access to, and manage our huge knowledge base.

3. **University Operational Excellence**
   - Simplifying our applications portfolio, their interconnections and infrastructure.

4. **IT Complexity Reduction**
   - Enhancements including collaboration, intranet and Carbon reduction initiatives.

5. **IT Functional Excellence**
   - Developing internal IT capabilities, staff skills, effective IT procurement and diverse funding sources.

**Research Management System**

The Research Management System will replace the existing (in-house) Publications and RAE/REF systems, and significantly improve the University’s ability to produce flexible and integrated research management information reports.

**Research Grants System**

A new web based system is being developed, to streamline and support Researchers in bidding for research grants. The Research Grants System will manage operational information relating to research proposals, becoming the centrepiece for information pertaining to all research grant activities at the University.

**Research outputs metadata**

This will provide an automatic feed of publications data to the new Research Management System, and provide citations and other contextual data for the purposes of KPT and league table monitoring, and preparation for the REF.

**Software Distribution**

The Software Distribution Project is implementing a solution that will manage the deployment of Windows software and applications across the University. A phased rollout of the system is expected to start towards the end of 2011 and will be on-going over the coming years. This will be crucial in further improving the reliability and flexibility of PCs across the university.

**IT Services**

IT Services has recently launched an app to give students free mobile access to important tools and information, enabling them to contact others, check for library books, and find available PCs across campus. The app works on iPhones, Android and iPads with plans to develop further content and launch on BlackBerry within the next few months.

**Carbon reduction**

The University is committed to making major savings in its CO2 footprint and IT Services is responding by innovating to support more efficiently. An ‘IT Carbon Action Plan’ has been approved which outlines actions from small to large, from personal to corporate. These include guidelines for switching off personal computers when not in use, and proposals for a new, highly energy efficient data centre.

**Architectural governance**

Enterprise Architecture governance framework and standards have been adopted as part of the IT Strategy. This has involved introducing a set of processes to allow IT Services to manage much more effectively the overall IT architecture, the communication of our technology standards, the means of reaching conclusion on the significant architectural decisions, and the process for requesting and approving exceptions.

**Case Studies**

Some of the fascinating work already being done on BlueBEAR can be seen at www.bear.bham.ac.uk/Casestudies/index.shtml

**High performance computing**

Data analysis, modelling and simulation have become the third tier of research, standing alongside theory and experiment. The IT Strategy facilitates research through the provision of high performance computing equipment. A new powerful resource, to replace our existing BlueBEAR cluster and keep us competitive, will be purchased to provide enhanced capability, and new functionality such as image rendering.

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**Research Management System**

The Research Management System will replace the existing (in-house) Publications and RAE/REF systems, and significantly improve the University’s ability to produce flexible and integrated research management information reports.

**Research Grants System**

A new web based system is being developed, to streamline and support Researchers in bidding for research grants. The Research Grants System will manage operational information relating to research proposals, becoming the centrepiece for information pertaining to all research grant activities at the University.

**Research outputs metadata**

This will provide an automatic feed of publications data to the new Research Management System, and provide citations and other contextual data for the purposes of KPT and league table monitoring, and preparation for the REF.

**Software Distribution**

The Software Distribution Project is implementing a solution that will manage the deployment of Windows software and applications across the University. A phased rollout of the system is expected to start towards the end of 2011 and will be on-going over the coming years. This will be crucial in further improving the reliability and flexibility of PCs across the university.

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Amy Cory learns how staff members can improve their health and fitness in just 60-minutes a week with a free exercise programme.

We all know that exercise is good for us, vital in fact to improve our health and fitness, and yet many of us are failing to meet the Government’s recommended guidelines? The most common excuse is simply failure to make time for exercise in our busy days. But now researchers in the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences are offering a solution to combat this difficulty with a pioneering new study for staff at the University.

Dr Chris Shaw, in collaboration with Professor Anton Wagenmakers and Dr Cecille Thogersen-Ntoumani, working in conjunction with the Munrow Sports Centre, have developed a groundbreaking training programme, utilising results from their work into high-intensity training (HIT) which proposes that very short periods of intense exercise can be just as beneficial as the current exercise guidelines of at least 30 minutes per day on most days of the week.

‘We are hoping to show that HIT can be applied in real life and will offer an opportunity for more people to fit exercise into their busy schedules,’ explains Chris. ‘Our previous laboratory research has shown that HIT exercise elicits the same improvements in cardiovascular and metabolic health and fitness as more intense exercise can be just as beneficial as the current exercise guidelines of at least 30 minutes per day on most days of the week.

‘People are always surprised at what people are able to achieve and how quickly they can improve, so I am confident that if we give participants the right guidance, we will see a considerable improvement in their health and fitness levels, cutting the risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disease and even improve participants’ concentration when they get back to their desks.’

High-intensity exercise involves short bouts of cycling at a fast pace with longer periods of rest. So far Chris’s research has been contained to cycling sessions on electromagnetically-braked exercise bikes in the Human Performance Laboratory, which accurately measure and control the exercise intensity of each individual. This new programme, designed exclusively for staff members, will involve one twenty-minute session in the spinning studio of the Munrow Sports Centre, three times a week for ten weeks. During the twenty-minute sessions, participants will undertake a series of short bouts of intense cycling (15–60 seconds), a technique which has proven successful in increasing insulin sensitivity.

‘HIT is a training method originally developed in Canada as a way of improving sporting performance for athletes, but it also offers many health and practical benefits too,’ adds Chris. ‘We have seen some really positive improvements in insulin sensitivity so far, which is an important measure of the risk of developing metabolic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes. Endurance athletes have the highest levels of insulin sensitivity and they often use HIT methods to train. Our previous studies have shown that it makes you better at burning the fat store in your muscles which we think is crucial to the improvements in insulin sensitivity.

‘In our previous studies we have had one participant who improved their aerobic fitness by 20 per cent in just four weeks, which is quite remarkable really. We also helped a wicket keeper score a couple of hundreds as a result of his increased fitness after our training regime.’

**New year new you?**

Most of us will have relied on antibiotic treatment at some point, but what if these staples of modern medicine are becoming victims of their own success? As our use of antibiotics grows, so does the ability of bacteria to develop resistance to antibiotic drugs, with the risk that many bacterial infections such as E.coli will become immune to the effects of antibiotics. The World Health Organisation has described antibiotic resistance as ‘one of the three greatest threats to human health’, which is quite remarkable really. We also helped a wicket keeper score a couple of hundreds as a result of his increased fitness after our training regime.

**Sign up now**

If you are looking for a way to burn off that extra slice of Christmas turkey or mince pie post-Christmas, then Chris and his team would love to hear from you. Beginning in January, the researchers are looking to recruit participants to take part in this new exercise class which offers rapid improvements to fitness and health over a ten-week period. If you struggle to fit regular exercise into your daily schedule then this is the class for you.

To be eligible, you must be: aged between 18–60, exercise less than 150 minutes a week currently and an employee of the University or University Hospital Birmingham. If you are interested in taking part, or would like to find out more, please contact Sam Shepherd, via sos499@bham.ac.uk.

LEADING THE CAMPAIGN FOR ANTIBIOTIC ACTION...
Accommodation to let
Cornish holiday home: One bedroom, in quiet location near Lands End available late July and August. Contact Sue Russell s.i.russell@bham.ac.uk (http://coastal-cottages.angelfire.com)


Staff groups
Knit and Natter is a group that meets every third Thursday of the month at 1.00pm in Café Aroma, Staff House. All crafters are welcome. Contact Laura Vale l.e.vale@bham.ac.uk.

Community groups
Royal Navy Veteran’s Association meets every Thursday 8.00pm, TS Sherbourne, 1667 Pershore Road, B30 3OR. Contact John 07879 456660.

Services
Gardening work in all seasons undertaken; including fencing, patios, decking, garden tidying/clearances and gutter cleaning. Contact Chris 0121 459 3292 or 07890 246911.

Mecs Maintenance includes electrical, plumbing, gas, plastering, kitchen/bathroom fitting and general maintenance. Fully qualified tradesmen. Free quote. Contact 07772 304479.

Community fencing club
Fancy Fencing for fitness and fun? Want to be fitter this year? Want to be fitter this year? Already working on it but need some sport-related focus? www.birminghamfencingclub.org.uk, based in the Old Gym, has courses, kit and coaches for all ages and abilities. Whether junior, social, beginner or competitive there is something for everyone.

For more events please visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/oncampus/index.aspx

Premier Squash League – World Class action
After a three year absence, we’re once again fielding a team in the Premier Squash League. The recently reformed University of Birmingham Sport team features the cream of higher education student and alumni squash players, including world number 38 Chris Ryder. Head to the Munrow Sports Centre on Tuesday January 31, for 7.00pm to watch UBSport vs. MB Nottingham, and Tuesday February 28 for UBSport vs Courtcraft Pontefract.

To find out more see www.sport.bham.ac.uk/clubs/squash/premierleaguesquash.shtml

Charles Dickens Bicentenary Exhibition
From 10 January 2012 a new exhibition from the Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections will be on view in the Muirhead Tower atrium to celebrate 200 years since the birth of the great Victorian novelist Charles Dickens (1812–1870). The exhibition will showcase original Dickens manuscript material together with early examples of Dickens’s classic tales. Guest speaker, Dr Tony Williams, Dickensian expert from Gresham College will be giving a talk to mark the bicentenary. Keep an eye on the On Campus web pages for more information www.birmingham.ac.uk/oncampus/index.aspx

Charles Dickens
Bicentenary Exhibition

THE AGE OF LEONARDO
Christian Themes in Italian Renaissance Prints,
16 January–21 June 2012
Marking the loan of some of the finest Leonardo da Vinci drawings from the Royal Collection to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery (13 January–26 March), this special collection display features ten works by some of the greatest 16th-century Italian print-makers.

Get involved at the Guild
As part of the University’s commitment to showcase the many dimensions of the ‘student experience’, the Guild will be promoting the services and opportunities available to the student community at the ‘Get involved’ event on Tuesday 31 January 2012. The event will run from 10.30am to 3.30pm in the Great Hall. A range of University services will be on display together with a myriad of student societies and other Guild activities. This is a great opportunity to learn more about Guild life and to show the many ways in which students can actively engage in the life of the University.

Ed Calcott, Guild International Officer
Dr Chris Allen…
in my own words

A mature student recently got me thinking about my journey into higher education and how I became a Lecturer in the Institute of Applied Social Studies. She said that she felt ‘out of her depth’ having arrived at Birmingham via an Access course when most others had worked hard to get good A-Level grades.

I told her that everyone who gets to University deserves to be here and explained that everyone’s journey was far from the same. My own was not in any way what you might describe as traditional.

Tracing my journey right back to its very beginning, I should start with my birth. My mum was an unmarried teenage mother in the mid-60s; my father absent; and we lived with my nan and granddad on a run-down council estate in inner city London. For some politicians and sections of the media they would have already written me off. In addition I grew up supporting Millwall FC – I still do – so I was surely a lost cause!

Whilst it would be true to say that education wasn’t given too much importance I went to school and did reasonably well. Doing reasonably well however is relative to your surroundings. When the first school league tables were published back in the 1990s, my primary school was on the front page of *The Mirror* dubbed the worst school in the country. This is what I meant when I said it’s relative.

Secondary school was awful but I achieved six O-Levels and decided to stay on to do A-Levels. Losing interest, not least because my family didn’t want me to go to university, I failed. I was lucky to get a finance job in the city of London. The family were happy.

Following over a decade and a half of jobs in finance I moved to Birmingham, gained three children, got married (and divorced) but it was when my son was born in late 1997 that I had an awakening: I couldn’t do finance work for another 30 years.

Despite failing at A-Level, my English Literature teacher – Mr Fishlock – had sparked something in me. Introducing me to a whole different approach to education – one that presented me with new ideas, challenged my world view and taught me education developed the individual - he left his legacy with me. I therefore decided that education was the key to a different future.

With his words ringing in my head, I looked on Ceefax – as you did in the late 1990s – and found that there were spaces to train as an RE teacher at the University of Wolverhampton. Being accepted onto the course because of my ‘life experience’ I suddenly found myself in higher education.

I felt a fraud and for the first year, I genuinely believed that someone would suddenly realise that I shouldn’t be there. I used to wait for the tap on the shoulder for them to boot me out for having hoodwinked them into thinking that I was good enough to be there.

That tap on the shoulder never came but what did was the realisation that I didn’t want to be a secondary school teacher and I changed to a degree in Religious Studies. Working as a shelf stacker in Boots overnight, running a gardening service during the day (around lectures) and being the primary carer for the kids – I graduated three years later.

Following good advice from lecturers at Wolverhampton I applied to Birmingham to do an MPhil and explore the issue of Islamophobia. Given that 9/11 occurred a month after, the rest I guess is history. But, even over the past decade, in needing to learn the difference between a MPhil and PhD, get work as a graduate tutor, do visiting lecturing at other universities and being published, those fraudulent feelings have not gone away. My family telling me that ‘people like me don’t go to university’ has stuck.

This hasn’t been a disadvantage for me and god forbid this comes across as a sob story, far from it. It’s just to highlight how different people have different journeys, some of which we don’t always know or acknowledge. Maybe sometimes we need to share these a little more and challenge the widespread perceptions that exist out there, and of course support those who may feel that their journey was ‘different’. If anything my journey has been an entirely positive one. It’s taught me not to take things for granted, to appreciate support and goodwill when you get it, and to take as many of the opportunities that come your way. And to try and do all that with a smile on your face, then things can’t be that bad.

Chris’s book *Islamophobia* is available from the publisher Ashgate and Amazon. ISBN: 9780754651406