Vice-Chancellor’s view

As I was driving home for Christmas I suddenly started sweating. This was not the onset of the Christmas ‘flu’ which so many of us suffer from. I avoided it this year. Nor was it a sudden anxiety attack around whether or not all of the Christmas arrangements were in place.

The problem was that my Audi had started malfunctioning and the heater was blasting out air at a positively tropical temperature! The car had done this once before, but the fault had soon remedied itself.

As you do when things go wrong with an older car (my Audi is nine years old) you wonder whether the time has come to think about changing the car. Many Audi owners will know the feeling. They are, in lots of ways, wonderful cars but they can be a bit temperamental.

I assumed that the problem would be fixable, but of course getting a car into a garage over Christmas is nearly impossible. A little bit of research on the web revealed a possible culprit. There are a couple of small pistons in the system which control the air conditioning system. Over time, deposits can form on the pistons causing them to seize. For those of you who are following this closely, the system is a hydraulic one.

So on the morning of Christmas Eve the toolbox was out, I stripped back the system, and finally was able to inspect the pistons, and there was indeed a deposit on one of them. I cleaned everything, reassembled it, and all is now well.

Universities, even ‘Universities of the Year’, are sometimes a bit like this. Much goes really well; we are progressing and thinking of other things, and then suddenly we get caught out by small things not going as well as they might.

Very often the solution is not a major overhaul of the university, or the equivalent of swapping a car for a small system malfunction. Much can be achieved by attending to the small things, fixing issues as and when they arise, and ensuring that the various engines and parts of the university are moving as they ought to.

Here there is much that all of us can do. All of us can reflect on how the parts of the University for which we are responsible are operating. All of us can reflect on the tasks that we do routinely and exceptionally, and think about ways in which small changes might lead to significant improvements.

All of us, too, over time can start to do things on autopilot or spend disproportionate times on certain activities which used to be important but now are rather less so. A small series of incremental improvements in a university of the scale of Birmingham could result in a massive change.

All of this is worth bearing in mind as we look to a challenging future. We are, in many ways, remarkably well-placed. The accolades that the University has recently received testify to that.

Nevertheless, as the recent decisions over university funding have made clear, we are in a challenging external environment and funding is likely to get tighter still. Charting a course through these difficult seas will not be straightforward. We will, over the course of the next fifteen months or so, reflect on and refresh the University’s Strategy. There may be areas where we commit ourselves to significant changes or significant new ventures. Nevertheless, we neglect the importance of smaller things at our peril.

Very often I am struck by the way in which we commit ourselves to doing the right things but do not then follow through as assiduously and consistently as we might. As I write, reflecting on the internal peer review of research grant proposals is one example. Some years ago we committed ourselves to ensuring that no grant proposal left the University without a stringent internal peer review.

The evidence, though, is that this is patchy both in its incidence and in its rigour. The very best universities are hugely rigorous in their internal review processes and the success they enjoy is partly attributable to that. Doing what we said we would in the way we said we would do it will yield immediate and significant results.

We have spent a lot of time reflecting

continued on page 3
on and refining our approach to PDRs. Now we have an enhanced system, using this in a way which is simultaneously sensitive and stretching will be another way in which we can continue to lift the performance of the University.

Finally there are those myriad small things. Ponder for a moment how often you have asked yourself: ‘Why do we do this?’ or ‘Why do we do this this way?’ Very often the responsibility for change is not somebody else’s responsibility but ours. If things are being done in ways which seem inappropriate, outdated, inefficient, or just plain redundant, rather than seeing it as somebody else’s responsibility to address this, we would be a more effective and a more mature institution if we all took responsibility for what we do and the way in which we do it.

Very often colleagues are inhibited by wondering whether or not they have the authority or the mandate to make changes. In areas where we are responsible for the University’s activity, we either have that responsibility or can talk immediately to other colleagues who do. There is nothing in our systems or hierarchies that should inhibit this, and much that should encourage it.

So, as with my Audi, fixing something very often does not involve major expense or even asking somebody else to do it. A bit of research, a bit of reflection, and a bit of initiative are often all that is needed. Oh yes, and if the heater on your car starts to malfunction you now know where to start.

Vice-Chancellor,
Professor David Eastwood

University staff recognised in New Year’s Honours

Pro-Chancellor, and Chair of University Council, Ed Smith is one of four University staff and associates recognised in the 2014 New Year’s Honours list. Mr Smith was awarded a CBE for services to higher education.

Professor Paul Cannon, Professor of Radio Science and Systems and former director of the Poynting Institute, received an OBE. British Empire Medals were awarded to Dr Simon Cotton; Honorary Senior Lecturer in Chemistry, for services to Chemistry, and Sylvia Gardiner, Digital Assets Assistant in Library Services; for services to higher education and charitable services in Ethiopia through a charity she founded called Lucía (Life Uplifted by Change in Africa).

Congratulating the four, Professor David Eastwood, Vice-Chancellor, said: ‘We are delighted that the hard work and dedication of so many of our staff and associates has been recognised in this way. I’m extremely pleased by the CBE awarded to Ed Smith, who has done a huge amount to drive our efforts to become a leading global university. His accolade, along with those received by Paul Cannon, Simon Cotton and Sylvia Gardiner, is well deserved and demonstrates the type of excellence we have here at Birmingham.’

BUAFTAs 2014 shortlist and raffle

Congratulations to all nominees for BUAFTAs 2014, and to shortlisted nominees who were announced in January. Judges scrutinised over 900 nominations to choose 48 shortlisted individuals and teams; a list of shortlisted nominees is available on the intranet and winners will be announced at the gala BUAFTA dinner on 28 February. All staff and students can still take part in the BUAFTA raffle to support the wonderful work of Acorns Children’s Hospice. Your support is invaluable and enables the charity to provide care to life limited and life threatened children and young people, and their families.

Tickets are only £1 each and by buying them you are contributing to cover the costs of a range of support including specialist care, and family accommodation at the hospice. You can also win amazing prizes, such as a 23” LCD TV or £100 in cash. For more information visit intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/buaftas or follow @BUAFTAs on Twitter.

Principal appointment

The University and governors of the University of Birmingham School have announced the appointment of one of the country’s most outstanding headteachers to its flagship training school.

Michael Roden, Head of King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Boys in Birmingham, will join the University School as Principal in April 2014 in order to prepare for its opening in September 2015. Mr Roden said: ‘I am delighted to be asked to lead this exciting and unique addition to the educational provision in the city.’

‘This is a critical appointment, not just for the University but for the entire city’ said Professor David Eastwood, Vice-Chancellor. ‘The University of Birmingham School will be the first of its kind in the UK – aiming to provide the very best education available anywhere, to a truly comprehensive cohort of pupils. Michael Roden has a proven track record of leading one of the best schools in the country. His new challenge will be recreating this level of excellence at a school that is non-selective for pupils aged 11–16, developing an exciting and innovative sixth form provision, and establishing the School as a beacon of excellence in teacher development.’
Universitas 21 (U21) is the leading global network of research-intensive universities, working together to foster global citizenship, and institutional innovation.

From its origins in 1997, U21 has grown to be a vibrant community of 27 leading universities from across 17 countries, and the University of Birmingham has played a key part in this development. Birmingham was a founding member of U21 and the network continues to provide an ideal platform on which to build strong international relations, and enhance education innovation.

‘Birmingham’s U21 membership provides terrific opportunities for staff and students to gain an international experience and develop their global networks,’ says Andréa Edwards, Director of International Development and Mobility. ‘We are delighted to have seen engagement in U21 activities across the University increase year on year.’

U21 opportunities for students are well known, but colleagues are often less aware of staff-specific opportunities which include early-career researcher conferences, staff mobility opportunities, funding to support teaching, and research collaboration including joint PhDs.

Professor Adam Tickell, Universitas 21 lead, says that: ‘The University is strongly committed to enhancing engagement within the U21 network to support our strategic global ambitions and enhance the staff and student experience, by encouraging researcher engagement, supporting the development of joint PhDs, and providing opportunities for international collaboration.’

U21 Staff Fellowships, open to both academic and administrative staff, provide opportunities to spend time at a partner institution in order to share best practice and support professional development.

Adriana Flores-Langarica, an Early-Career Researcher from the School of Immunity and Infection, said of her recent Fellowship: ‘It allowed me to establish collaboration with colleagues at Lund University to not only promote our research but enhance it. I was able to learn techniques and use resources not available at the University of Birmingham. As a result we are establishing new projects to develop between groups. Personally it was a great opportunity for me to enrich my CV and boost networking.’

The full range of opportunities for staff and students, including details of staff fellowships, funding for teaching and research collaborations, and opportunities to participate in international events, can be found on the intranet at intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/external/international/relations/U21/index.aspx

Universitas 21 (U21) is the leading global network of research-intensive universities, working together to foster global citizenship, and institutional innovation.

The Birmingham Professional Forum is a termly event for all administrative, technical, and support staff based across the University, led by the Registrar and Secretary, Lee Sanders. The Forum includes presentations on opportunities for personal and professional development, and topical subjects for the University, and there is also an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the event. You can do this in advance by emailing internalcomms@contacts.bham.ac.uk or on the day by tweeting @buzzunibham or raising your hand in the hall. Further details and presentation topics are on the intranet at intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/bpf

**BIRMINGHAM GLOBAL**

**UNIVERSITAS 21**

**U21 partner institutions:**

Universities of:
- Amsterdam, Auckland, Birmingham, British Columbia, Connecticut, Delhi, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Maryland, Melbourne, New South Wales, Nottingham, Queensland, Virginia, and also
- Fudan University, Korea University, Lund University, McGill University, National University of Singapore, Ohio State University, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Tecnológico de Monterrey, University College Dublin, Waseda University.

Learn more
For further details contact Matt Clulee, U21 Project Officer, at m.clulee@bham.ac.uk

**The Birmingham Professional Forum**

Tuesday 11 February, 11.00am–12.00noon
Elgar Concert Hall, Bramall Music Building

**NEWS**
‘Express’ way to achieve fitness goals

BODYCOMBAT™, BODYATTACK™, BODYBALANCE™ and BODYPUMP™
Express classes are a great way to get in shape. With workloads and time pressures increasing, it’s easy to skip fitness classes because of not having the time to get in, get changed and do the class. This is why UBSport have launched new 45-minute express classes. Most of us can find a spare 45 minutes a few times a week, even during the busiest time of year, meaning you don’t have to forsake your fitness goals for a hectic schedule.

In this shorter, Les Mills approved format, you will still warm up and work your legs, chest, back, and abs. These muscle groups are key to the maintenance of posture, overall tone, and functional strength. You can still also attend the original hour-long Les Mills classes for the additional benefit of arm toning, stabilizer development, and more calories burned! Express classes are ideal if you are:
- New to the exercise programme and need to build up endurance
- Short on time
- In need of a short strength or endurance session to combine with a cardio class

There are also express classes in Spin, Pilates and Abs to add some variety outside of the Les Mills programme. For booking details and class descriptions visit sport.bham.ac.uk/alp

UB Liftshare

For some of us, travelling to work by car really is the only option, and in recognition of this the University has partnered with Liftshare.com to launch a new scheme called UB Liftshare. Launching on 11 February, UB Liftshare will enable staff and students to search for potential car sharing matches in order to split travel costs, save on fuel and parking fees, and minimise their environmental impact.

The scheme will be free to use and available to anyone with a University of Birmingham email address. Upon registering your details UB Liftshare will supply a list of potential matches for you to make contact with and set up a car-share arrangement.

Car sharing has many benefits; not only is it good for the environment and helps to reduce traffic congestion, but it is also good for your wallet! You could save over £900 per year and halve your commuting emissions, making your journeys as environmentally friendly as using the train.

If you sign up to UB Liftshare between 11–28 February you will be entered into a prize draw to win a Nexus 7 Tablet.

For further information visit intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/liftshare

What is it?
The Ages of Man, attributed to Cornelis Saftleven (1607–1681)

Where is it?
The Campus Collection of Fine and Decorative Art, Research and Cultural Collections

This 17th-century oil painting depicts the artist’s conception of the human life cycle from childhood to the grave. Death was never far away in the 17th century and as a consequence mortality was a common theme in art of the time. Unlike ‘memento mori’ artworks which reminded the viewer of the inevitability of death, this painting makes visible the ageing process and gradual physical decline of the body. This campus curiosity is inspired by the University’s 2014 Arts & Science festival (17–21 March) which has the theme of ‘Life & Death’. 
As you may have seen in buzz bitesize and on the University intranet, the University Executive Board (UEB) has designated 2013–14 as a year of Advancing Equality and Diversity in Employment. The purpose of the initiative is to signal a step change in the University’s approach to equality and diversity, and to acknowledge that there is a longer term programme required to achieve a more balanced workforce.

I recently joined the University as Advancing Equality in Employment Coordinator to ensure that priorities set for this ‘Year of Equality’ are achieved and continue to develop beyond 2013–14. This is a challenging and exciting year in which the University can achieve much in its aspiration to become an exemplar University in Advancing Equality in Employment.

There are three key goals for the project:

- To boost the degree to which equality is embedded in management practice
- To review and refresh the policy framework, addressing any outdated areas of discretion in terms of good practice
- To maximise talent in the University

‘Advancing Equality in Employment is only going to make a significant difference if it is owned across the University’, explains Professor Martin Stringer, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Staffing. ‘We are committed to embedding equality and diversity into management practices across the institution. We are reviewing and refreshing practices and policies and consulting widely with representatives of all protected characteristics.’

This activity includes:

- **Equality and diversity champions**

  UEB members have agreed to act as champions on particular aspects of equality and diversity in order to show their commitment to the initiative and encourage senior staff to embed equality and diversity into business planning. Champions will play a vital role in promoting a positive working environment in which staff are treated fairly and with respect, and encourage all staff to play a role in creating and maintaining a culture in which harassment and discrimination are understood to be unacceptable forms of behaviour.

  There is also an opportunity for all schools and departments to have their own equality and diversity champions who will play a vital role in promoting a positive working environment for colleagues. The development of an equality and diversity champion network is intended to ensure that all staff have access to clear support to address difficulties in the workplace and to sensitively address any issues. Champions will meet as a network to identify common concerns and contribute to the development of positive and preventative action to improve communications and relationships between staff. Champions will also articulate the business case to drive behavioural and cultural change.

**Promoting Equality, Celebrating Diversity film**

The Advancing Equality in Employment project group have produced a short film that complements the initiative and introduces new and long-serving members of staff to the range of equality and diversity support, services, and research available across the University. The film comprises brief informal interviews with a wide range of Academic and Professional Services colleagues who are at the heart of equality and diversity activity. To watch the film visit intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/advancingequality

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**Forthcoming events:**

- **LGBT History Month, throughout February**
  (See page 11 of buzz for further details)
- **Interfaith Event, 4 March**
  (This year the event is for both students and staff. If any staff would like to be involved please contact Kulvinder Hira)
- **International Women’s Day, 8 March**
  (If any staff would like to be involved please contact Kulvinder Hira)
- **Arts & Science Festival, 16–23 March**
  (See page 15 of buzz for further details)
Birmingham Fellows: Setting the intellectual agenda

Bryoney Johnson finds out more about the University’s bold Birmingham Fellows scheme, and meets some of our outstanding early-career researchers.

The Birmingham Fellows scheme was launched in 2011 to recruit the academic leaders of tomorrow, and provide support for high-calibre early-career researchers from around the world. Over 2,600 applications were received for the first three rounds of recruitment, and over 60 Birmingham Fellows have been appointed in a range of research areas from Chemistry to Conflict, and from Ethics to Economics.

Birmingham Fellows are appointed to permanent academic posts, and have five years of protected time for high-quality research. ‘This is an outstanding opportunity for early-career researchers to join a vibrant intellectual environment where they will be able to fulfil their potential to become research leaders of the future’ says Professor Malcolm Press, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer. It also provides the University with a unique opportunity to enhance existing academic strengths, and contribute to the growing culture of collaboration and interdisciplinarity that exists across colleges and research fields.

Although research-focused, fellows are appointed to research and teaching contracts, reflecting the University’s commitment to teaching as an integral part of an academic career. All fellows also receive extensive support throughout their Fellowship, including an academic mentor, and development activities in both research and teaching.

Applications have recently closed for the third round of recruitment however the University will launch a fourth recruitment round in summer 2014 and will consider candidates under the Fast Track scheme at any time. For further details email birminghamfellows@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Turn to page 16 of this edition of buzz for a profile of Birmingham Fellow Dr Richard Butler.
Academics and community groups in Birmingham – led by the University – will collaborate as never before to mark the centenary of the First World War.

March 21 will see the public launch at the New Library of Birmingham of one of only five centres across the country being set up to commemorate the Great War and its legacy.

The library will be the focus for workshops, exhibitions and wide-ranging research on how the conflict has shaped the past 100 years in a £500,000 project funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

That the University is co-ordinating the ambitious scheme is thanks to Professor Ian Grosvenor, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Cultural Engagement, who led the consortium bid application for funding to set up the commemoration centre.

‘The five centres will work with communities to collaboratively co-produce research on World War One and its legacy,’ explains Ian. ‘What that means is that community groups will come forward with ideas, and we will work with them to deliver their project, which might be the history of a war memorial, the famous Zeppelin raids over Walsall or how children on the home front were affected by the war.’

These small-scale community projects will be funded by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to the tune of between £3,000 and £8,000 per scheme.

Ian, who wrote the bid, is the Principal Investigator, and heads a team of two co-investigators, both from the University, and academics from four other universities in the region – Birmingham City, Newman, Worcester and Wolverhampton. In addition, there are 24 cultural partners, including the Cheltenham Festivals, the BBC and the Ecumenical Commission.

In fact, marking the 100th anniversary of the Great War was on Ian’s agenda 18 months before the AHRC and HLF invited bids to open centres around the country.
'In January 2011, I co-convened a working group with Toby Watley of the Birmingham Museums Trust and Chris O’Neil of Birmingham Institute of Art and Design to see what we as a city were going to do to commemorate World War One,' he recalls. 'We invited people we thought would be interested to come along – and we’ve been meeting every two months since then, trying to co-ordinate what we are going to do. As a result, we are probably the best-organised city in the country.  

'So when the call went out for bids for what was originally seven commemoration centres, I already had in place local partners who wanted to put on events and conduct research about World War One, and all of them were very interested in the idea of a centre in Birmingham'.

As well as exploring afresh the impact of the First World War on communities in Birmingham and the Midlands, Ian and his team have also had to identify themes of national importance.

'We’ve identified certain themes we think we can lead on: one is gender and the home front – what happened to families – which is being led by Professor Maggie Andrews from the University of Worcester. Another is commemorations, led by Joanne Saynor, and a third is the whole issue of religion and belief – the rise of spiritualism, the role of army chaplains, Quakers and pacifism – and that’s being led by Dr Michael Snape. Birmingham is a good place to do this because of its cultural diversity and its non-conformist history.

Marking the anniversary of the war itself is important, but the commemoration is more far-reaching than that, says Ian.

‘It’s not just about what happened between 1914 and 1918, it’s the legacy of the war. For example, by 1916, training programmes for soldiers with disabilities were being held in the Jewellery Quarter; by 1930, child guidance clinics had been set up – almost certainly the result of the emotional turmoil caused to youngsters during the Great War.

‘How did people in the 1930s mark the First World War and was it different to how they marked it in the 1970s? How has the interpretation of World War One and its causes changed over the years?’

‘When I wrote the bid, I had to write about what would make our centre distinctive, and I wrote about the city’s cultural diversity, the fact Birmingham has the youngest population in Europe, raising the question of what it means to young people in Birmingham – how does World War One connect with their lives? And what’s the relevance of the war to Birmingham’s black population?’

Ian acknowledges that such a commemoration is politically sensitive, because the past is always open to interpretation.

‘Our role in this centre is to support communities engaging in those interpretations. This is not about “we won”; it’s to critically step back and think about what the enormous conflict meant and still means – and what it does for our sense of community. I think only good will come out of it.’

The centre – based in the New Library because the building is a magnet for visitors to the city – is being co-ordinated by Dr Nicola Gauld. It offers, says Ian, a ‘fantastic’ opportunity for the University to work more closely with the wider community and conduct research in a different way.

‘Civic engagement is part of the University’s strategic framework, and this is a fantastic opportunity for us to engage with the city. Research council funding now comes with an expectation of public engagement. But many of us have never worked this way – so one of the big outcomes of this will be to give academics the experience of working on a small scale with communities in order to produce research.

‘So this centre and attendant projects are about marking a significant event in history, but also offer opportunities for outward-looking universities such as Birmingham to engage with the wider community and build relationships that will be important for the future.

‘As the principal investigator, I’m responsible for managing it and the budget and making sure we deliver the project, as well as working collaboratively with all the other centres.’

As well as doing justice to the memory of World War One, Ian is confident the commemoration will lead to further funding and raise the profile of the University and its partners.

‘The centres will have to have a legacy – understanding the best ways of working with universities. That will be very valuable and has the potential to change the way we conduct research.’

This article appears in the Spring 2014 edition of the University’s flagship research magazine Original, which has as its theme the First World War.
The majority of students at the University study on campus and reside in University-owned accommodation or within commuting distance of campus. This can be described as the ‘standard’ mode of teaching delivery. Alternative Modes of Delivery (AMD) is a catch-all title used to refer to delivery modes which differ from this standard.

Perhaps the most familiar AMD example is the online distance learning degree (DL), where delivery of modules and supervision is by electronic communication with students in the UK or overseas. Between these ends of the spectrum there are a number of models that combine ‘face-to-face’ delivery with distance learning or intensive block delivery of teaching, where modules are delivered in two to three weeks. Block delivery is often delivered by Birmingham staff who visit international partner institutions, and are our so-called ‘flying faculty’.

It may come as a surprise, but Birmingham is already one of the UK’s leaders in this type of activity. As of November 2012, there were nearly 3,000 students studying at the University in various modes of AMD.

There are over 800 students currently studying on our DL Foundation degree golf programme, 600 students enrolled in the Certificate in ‘Special Needs’ education, and over 500 students taught by ‘flying faculty’ at the Singapore Institute of Management. These initiatives have helped to make Birmingham the fourth largest provider of AMD programmes in the Russell Group.

The University has done a great deal to build on this existing success. Last year the College of Arts and Law led the way in making some of its doctoral programmes available on a distance learning basis, and there are plans to launch a new range of ‘flying faculty’ programmes in China. The University is also a major participant in UK FutureLearn, for the delivery of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). These courses will act as 'tasters' to attract applicants to our degree programmes and qualifications. Birmingham scored a considerable coup last year when, in conjunction with KPMG and Manchester Business School, it was awarded the contract to deliver all management leadership training in the NHS.

What started out as a series of small, local initiatives has grown in both scale and scope to the point where it now represents a sizable proportion of the University’s teaching activity.

Dr Glyn Watson, Director of Alternative Modes of Delivery, tells buzz about the University’s innovative approaches to ‘off-campus’ teaching.
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) History Month is an annual celebration of the lives and achievements of the LGBT community that takes place across the country every February. The University will be joining in with LGBT History Month 2014 with a range of performances, film nights, talks and events across campus that celebrate the history of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities. Students, staff, alumni and visitors are all welcome to attend.

This year’s packed LGBT History Month schedule has been curated by the staff LGBTQ Rainbow Network, the student LGBTQ Association, the Barber Institute of Fine Arts and the Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections.

**PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS**

**LGBT History Month Launch Extravaganza**
7 February, 7.30–9.00pm, Elgar Concert Hall, Bramall Music Building, £5 (£2 for students), booking required
An evening of celebration, music and laughter that will officially launch LGBT History Month at the University of Birmingham. Compered by renowned performer Rose Collis, the show will also feature a string quartet with a twist, performing disco hits in a classical style! There will also be songs, sketches and excerpts from other University LGBT History Month events; including performances from Baron Sternlook’s Big Naughty Gay Improvised Musical, The Vagina Monologues and Le Cabaret Du Chat Électrique II. This unforgettable cavalcade of entertainment is sure to entertain all! Email k.a.hall@bham.ac.uk to book your place.

**Educate and celebrate:**
Creating LGBT-friendly schools and workplaces
12 February, 6.00–7.00pm, wine served from 5.30pm, Barber Lecture Theatre, Barber Institute of Fine Arts
FREE, booking required
Join Elly Barnes, voted ‘number one’ in the Independent on Sunday’s Pink List 2011, for an inspirational and entertaining lecture on changing opinion and incorporating diversity in your school or workplace. Elly will talk about her own experiences, both successes and failures, in creating institutional change and share her tried and tested approaches to creating an enlightened LGBT friendly environment. Call 0121 414 2261 or email education@barber.org.uk to book your place.

**Behind the scenes – The hidden life of Henry Reed**
13 February, 1.10pm, Chamberlain Seminar Room, Cadbury Research Library: Special Collections, Muirhead Tower FREE, booking required
Henry Reed (1914–1986) was a poet, critic, playwright, radio dramatist, translator and journalist. This talk will explore Reed’s fascinating life-story both as a public figure and as a private man. Reed’s story will be told through the original manuscripts contained in his archive. These include his unpublished literary works and personal correspondence to his one-time partner Michael Ramsbotham. Email special-collections@bham.ac.uk to book your place.

'A Little Gay History':
LGBT and world history
24 February, 6.00–7.00pm, wine served from 5.30pm, Barber Lecture Theatre, Barber Institute of Fine Arts
FREE, booking required
Richard Parkinson will present a groundbreaking LGBT history project by the British Museum, drawing on objects ranging from ancient Egyptian papyri to images by modern artists such as David Hockney and Bhupen Khakhar, to discuss how and why museums should represent same-sex experiences as integral parts of world culture. Call 0121 414 2261 or email education@barber.org.uk to book your place.

‘The University is proud of its diverse staff and student bodies and recognises the significant impact LGBTQ people have had on the University, as a research institution and welcoming place to work. LGBT History Month will provide the perfect forum for us to celebrate our diverse workforce, showcase our research into LGBTQ issues and highlight the University’s commitment to its equality objectives.’
Professor Adam Tickell, Provost and Vice-Principal, LGBTQ Champion

For full listings of University events and activities during LGBT History Month 2014 visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/lgbt2014.
Transforming our campus

The University has taken a step closer to providing Birmingham’s first 50m swimming pool with the recent announcement that work will start on the new £55 million sports centre in April.

The sports centre, which will sit on the corner of Bristol Road and Edgbaston Park Road, will be open to staff, students, and the wider community. In addition to the pool, the Centre will also feature an arena sports hall with seating for up to 900 spectators, six squash courts, six activity rooms for a wide range of sport and fitness classes, a 225-station gym, and various other facilities. The 13,200sqm centre will also boast a purpose designed Wellbeing and Performance Centre, making it one of the UK’s leading indoor sports centres.

‘This is a large and complex project, which is the culmination of many years of planning and design’ says Zena Wooldridge, Director of Sport. ‘We’re very excited that construction is now about to start. The new facilities, and opportunities they will house, will be a game-changer for the University, both in raising its profile as a leading UK sporting university, and in its provision for the local and regional community.’

The construction is being led by international support services and construction group, Interserve. The company have a ten-year relationship with the University and many Civil Engineering graduates are now working for the company.

In addition to donations from alumni and friends of the University, the project is also being supported by Sport England who are contributing £2 million of National Lottery investment into the sports centre through the Olympic legacy fund ‘Iconic Facilities’. Sport England Property Director Charles Johnston said: ‘I am delighted that work is beginning at the University of Birmingham, helping it to become a centre of sporting excellence in the West Midlands. Good sports facilities play an important role in local communities; they not only improve people’s sporting experience but also help attract new participants. The new facilities at the University will do just this.’

‘The facilities are not only designed to provide a high-quality experience for our leading regional and national sportsmen and women, but also to better serve those with disabilities, injuries or health issues, and those who just want to keep fit or play sport socially’ adds Zena Wooldridge. ‘It has an important role to play in the city’s future vision for sport.’

The University’s Development, Alumni and Business Engagement (DABE) team have been welcoming support for the sports centre development from alumni and friends of the University, with more than £320,000 from 560 people raised so far. Look out across campus for an exciting and interactive DABE campaign that will be launching later this year to provide updates as the build continues and help secure a further £2 million of support towards the building.

“We are delighted that so many people from our University community and from the city have already committed to supporting this project,” says Zena Wooldridge. “This generous philanthropic support makes a real difference to our plans, enabling the University to create a building filled with specialist equipment that genuinely reflects Birmingham’s status as one of the top three universities for sport in the UK and creates opportunities for people across our community.”

To find out more about how you can support the campus developments visit birmingham.ac.uk/alumni/giving/sportscentre.aspx or contact Jessica Robinson on 0121 414 9162 or at j.m.robinson@bham.ac.uk
Engaging with the Universe

At the end of 2013, the University of Birmingham introduced a new, state-of-the-art telescope to its Observatory, opening up opportunities for students, researchers and the local community. Samantha Williams met Dr Graham Smith to find out what this means for the University.

The new telescope delivered to the University’s observatory on the outskirts of Birmingham in August last year is the largest and most powerful optical telescope in the West Midlands. Rare among university observatories, the new telescope provides extremely high quality data, not previously available to Birmingham students.

As well as playing a big part in research projects in the School of Physics and Astronomy, the University of Birmingham Observatory is used by students on the Physics and Astrophysics undergraduate degree programme as part of their weekly laboratory work. Readers may recall seeing the first student observations on BBC Midlands Today when the team filmed for a special stargazing feature. Dr Graham Smith, Reader in Cosmology and Director of the Observatory, highlighted that: ‘Our new telescope is revolutionising the learning opportunities for Birmingham students. They can observe much fainter objects – including planets, stars, and galaxies – than they could before. A wide variety of new and exciting student projects are now possible.’

When Graham took over as Director 12 months ago he hoped to enhance the student experience beyond the technical capabilities of the Observatory. He says: ‘The optical design of our new telescope is state-of-the-art and matches the design of the most professional research telescopes. The parallels with research level observing don’t stop there. Last term, for the first time, students wrote formal observing proposals, and were asked to peer review their proposals. They get a totally authentic experience of how it is in the real world. This is a fantastic experience for them, whatever their ultimate career destination may be.’

Not only does the new technology change the way students see the Universe but Graham’s team invite the local community to gain new perspective too. ‘Astronomy is a fantastic way to engage young minds in physics and science’ said Graham. The Observatory is therefore open to the public periodically for outreach and visitor events. This year the School of Physics and Astronomy, together with the student society AstroSoc and the Birmingham Astronomical Society, will launch a new programme of events named ‘Astronomy in the City’ to follow on from the nationwide Stargazing Live in January. New developments at the Observatory are made possible by a significant team effort within the School of Physics and Astronomy. Graham comments: ‘Working with colleagues to redevelop our observatory continues to be among the most satisfying experiences of my time in Birmingham. On behalf of our students I thank the whole team of current and retired academic colleagues, numerous postgraduates and postdocs, support staff, and alumni. The heroic achievements of our engineering team in the workshop, led by Steve Brookes, deserve a special mention’.

The new Alluna Optics Ritchey Chretien telescope was supported by Dr Ken Elliott and Elliott Instruments and the University’s Circles of Influence campaign.

The telescope was part funded by the generosity of our alumni. To find out more about the ways in which alumni have supported the University and how you could get involved please visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/giving
Our regular feature gives buzz readers a quick tour of the latest University news hitting the headlines and activity among our online community.

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.

Tony Belli, Reader in Neurotrauma, was widely interviewed about the head injuries sustained by Michael Schumacher following a skiing accident. He appeared on the ITV Daybreak sofa, and several other news outlets including The Guardian, Sky News, Sky Sports, BBC Radio Five Live, and BBC World Service.

Professor Jenny Phillimore, Professor of Migration and Superdiversity, was interviewed on BBC Radio 5 Live on the perception of migration among the UK population.

Dr Jeremy Pritchard, Senior Lecturer in the School of Biosciences, was featured in a video piece on The Guardian website about tackling creationism in schools.

Dr Moataz Attallah, Lecturer in Advanced Materials Processing, created a 3D printed reindeer that was featured in the Daily Telegraph, the Birmingham Post, and other specialist press.

feeling social...

With many of us using the new year as an excuse to get fit, our very own University of Birmingham Sport (UBSport) have released a new video that encompasses the passion and dedication of sport at Birmingham – and invites you to be part of it. Taking a song that is considered to be the University’s sporting anthem, ‘You are my Birmingham’, (as adapted from the original 1939 song, ‘You are my Sunshine’), UBSport enlisted the help of MA Music student Charles Lockwood to re-score the soundtrack. With vocals from BMus student Katie Levine, the epic video features almost 200 UBSport student-athletes, who all volunteered their time for the filming. The video was launched on 29 November and has enjoyed nearly 70,000 views on YouTube! If you’ve not seen the video for yourself, visit our official YouTube channel now at www.youtube.com/unibirmingham

Over on Twitter, there has been lots of excitement about the launch of our newest MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), Shakespeare’s Hamlet: text, Performance, and Culture. As well as learners tweeting about how much they are enjoying the course from all over the world, we’ve also had acknowledgement from actor Ben Crystal (@bencrystal), Chicago Shakespeare (@chicagoshakes) and the Dane himself (@cheeruphamlet)!

Find out more about MOOCs on page 10 of this edition of buzz.
Programme highlights

Launch concert: Mozart’s Requiem
Sunday 16 March, 6.00pm
Town Hall, Birmingham City Centre
Launching the Arts & Science Festival, Simon Halsey will lead the University Chorus in a performance of Mozart’s final work, the Requiem Mass. In contrast the Philharmonic Orchestra will perform Copland’s popular Appalachian Spring and Mahler’s Blumine, a work originally penned in 1884 and considered by many to be a gesture of love from the composer to Joanna Richter. £15/£10 concession/£5 students (plus transaction fee). Tickets can be purchased at thsh.co.uk or by calling 0121 345 0603.

Mortality Matters
Tuesday 18 March, 1.15–1.45pm
Barber Institute of Fine Arts
Explore references to life and death in paintings throughout the Barber’s collection. Examine how artists have discussed life and death throughout history, discovering hidden symbolic references and links to science in this 30-minute gallery talk. Admission free, no booking required.

When life means death… are life sentences an appropriate alternative to the death penalty?
Thursday 20 March, 12.30–1.30pm
Law Building, Lecture Theatre 2
The UK is currently struggling with the question of how to punish those who commit the most serious offences. David Cameron has recently criticised the European Court of Human Rights for holding that ‘whole life orders’ are unlawful, and there are many who believe that we should be able to ‘lock people up and throw away the key.’ In this talk Dr Bharat Malkani, of the Birmingham Law School, will examine the pros and cons of whole life orders, and suggest that they are, in practical terms, the same as the death penalty. Admission free, no booking required.

Back to back and up the yard: life and death in back-street Birmingham, 1880–1960
Friday 21 March, 1.00–2.00pm
Arts Building, Lecture Room 7
Carl Chinn, Professor of Birmingham Community History and author of over 20 books on the history of Birmingham, the Black Country and the urban working class in England, will take you back in time to unravel the history of one of Birmingham’s most fascinating areas. Admission free, booking recommended. Please email culture@contacts.bham.ac.uk

The University welcomes the return of its Arts & Science Festival this March with a week-long celebration of ideas, research, and collaboration across campus. Running 16–23 March, at venues across the Edgbaston campus, the festival is open to staff, students, and the wider community and many events are free to attend.

The festival is led by the University’s Cultural Engagement Team, with support from a wide range of staff and students. The Festival also welcomes regional partners including Flatpack Film Festival, who celebrate the opening weekend of their annual film festival with PHOTO-CINEMA-THEATRE on 23 March, presented in partnership with The Barber Institute of Fine Arts. This unique premiere will see early sound cinema short films restored and screened in the UK for the first time.

For this year’s festival event organisers have responded to the theme of ‘Life & Death’ with an incredibly varied programme of events and activities.
I chose Birmingham for a number of reasons; one of them being that the Birmingham Fellows scheme was just such a fantastic opportunity. To have five years protected research time and the opportunity to establish myself as a researcher is very attractive compared to schemes offered by other universities. Birmingham also has a very strong reputation in my research field; there is a substantial group of palaeontologists working here, and undergraduate degree programmes that fit very closely to what I do including those in Geology and Palaeobiology and Palaeoenvironments.

My research is focused on understanding how, when, and why, dinosaurs became successful. For around 135 million years they were the dominant animals in terrestrial ecosystems, but at the start of their evolution they were small and rare within most ecosystems. Dinosaurs appeared during the Triassic, a very interesting period which lasted from around 200 to 250 million years ago. It started with the largest mass extinction in the history of life, where around 90 per cent of species became extinct, and also ended with a major mass extinction. In between there was this crazy time of ‘experimentation’ when lots of bizarre animals evolved, survived for relatively short periods of time and then went extinct. At the same time many other groups appeared that went on to become some of the most important groups in the history of life – and among those you have the dinosaurs.

My interest in palaeontology started as a Geology undergraduate at Bristol, and it was through doing my final-year research project that I decided I wanted to do research afterwards. I was accepted into Cambridge where I did my PhD, then spent seven years as a postdoc in London and Munich, and started my Birmingham Fellowship in August 2013.

I would absolutely recommend the scheme to other early-career researchers. The freedom it allows to develop your research career and profile is fantastic, but at the same time I feel like a full member of academic staff. I think that combination is unique, and a very exciting thing to have as a young researcher.

I also have the role of Academic Keeper at the University’s Lapworth Museum, and having been associated with museum collections in every institute I’ve worked in it was attractive to me to work somewhere that had a major museum collection. I worked as a post-doc at the Natural History Museum in London for three years, and also at the Bavarian State Collection of Palaeontology in Munich, so it feels very natural to be working at the Lapworth. I support the Museum Director, providing input on the scientific use of the museum. It’s a very exciting time; I’m heavily involved in the planned major redevelopment of the museum. It’s a once in a lifetime opportunity for a palaeontologist to be involved in the design of a major new permanent exhibition.

I also supervise two PhD students, and am getting involved in undergraduate teaching. I see both teaching and research as important for my Fellowship. The research is the reason I got into this career, but I enjoy teaching and consider it to be an important part of my work and development as a university academic.

One of my highlights since arriving in Birmingham is that I’ve just been awarded a Marie Curie Career Integration Grant from the European Union, which provides funding for researchers moving within Europe to long-term research positions. Through the funding I will be able to do field work in South Africa and Argentina to search for early dinosaurs and dinosaur relatives, which is also a great opportunity to build links between the University and researchers in those countries.

I love the campus and all of the staff that I’ve encountered at the University have been great to work with. There is a genuine sense of community here; perhaps it comes from Birmingham being a campus-based university. For example, I regularly play football with people from the School and it’s been years since I’ve been involved in anything like that!