Degree congregations are one of the real highlights of the University calendar, a time when campus is animated by an air of celebration as our graduates and those close to them gather to take pride in their achievements. It is a time for reflecting on success, but also looking forward to the challenges ahead. Those of us who speak at the ceremonies have the opportunity to address our graduating students at a vital moment in their lives, a time when they are starting a new chapter, when they are forging their own path, and when they are starting to explore the ways in which they can influence, even shape, the world around them. As a result, and much to the chagrin of those who prepare the speeches for such occasions, I have a habit of departing from script when I believe there is a critical issue on which our graduating cohort should focus. My chosen extemporisation for the December degree congregations was to challenge what it might mean if we were moving into a post-truth, post-fact era.

The concept of post-truth, although established for at least the last decade, accelerated into the national consciousness during the second half of 2016 as we sought to understand the nature of the debates leading up to the EU referendum and the American presidential election. Evidenced fact, unsubstantiated claims, and personal opinion were conflated through the falsely balancing platforms of social media and rolling news. Alarmingly, for those of who have dedicated our lives to the pursuit of knowledge, and the contested nature of truth, we found ourselves in a world in which political expediency led some of our own politicians to assert that Britain had ‘had enough of experts’. Oxford Dictionaries decided that post-truth was their 2016 word of the year – a decision-making process which, not without irony, must have required considerable research of the facts and considered knowledge, and the contested nature of truth. We found ourselves in a world in which political expediency led some of our own politicians to assert that Britain had ‘had enough of experts’. Oxford Dictionaries decided that post-truth was their 2016 word of the year – a decision-making process which, not without irony, must have required considerable research of the facts and thoughtful debate about the right outcome.

As we enter 2017, we are told that a man glancing out at a crowd and estimating he has seen one and a half million people carries equal weight to photographic evidence that suggests otherwise. Inaccurate claims are designated ‘alternative facts’ without any apparent sense of Orwellian irony.

In the public sphere at least, what we are witnessing seems to suggest not simply the age-old political problem of politicians exaggerating and spinning claims, but rather a situation in which truth itself has become secondary to emotions, assertion, and personal belief.

If we are indeed entering a post-truth era then, as I told the graduating students, we are entering an era that stands in opposition to everything that is fundamental to the very idea of a university. If the commentators are right, then the future is dismal and will be characterised by values which are the very antithesis of our University.

Universities are places of enquiry and research, where knowledge is discovered, ordered, debated and, yes, taught. In exploring, contesting, and forming knowledge universities allow us to deepen and refine our understanding. Above all, universities are places that seek after evidenced truth and take us all to a still higher stage of human awareness and understanding. It is not for nothing that we talk of academic discourses. The University of Birmingham was founded in the mission to create that knowledge, and to share that understanding with our students, the communities around us, and wider society.

Those of you who research and teach contribute profoundly to that endeavour, as do all those who support that work. So, how should we respond? I believe profoundly we in universities have a particular responsibility to stand for truth, for the quest for truth, and to underline the importance of truth. Certainly, we must respond to the age in which we find ourselves, post-truth or otherwise. We must accept the honest tensions and frustrations that are felt by many in our evolving and changing society, whilst remaining confident in the evidence that underpins the methodologies of the disciplines we research and teach.

We must become even better at communicating that evidence, demonstrate how it has helped us to form our judgements, and explain the ways in which those judgements can improve our society and address the grand challenges we face. We must listen to and respond to challenge whilst refusing to accept the patronising contradictions of politicians who play to an audience’s desire for emotional appeal ahead of the truth. We must define ourselves by our rigour, honesty, self-challenge, and balance.

As a University let us stand for something different, something better, something higher. Different because it’s grounded in understanding, better because it’s grounded in evidence, higher because we want better for ourselves and our societies than some dismal quest for a post-truth age.
The University of Birmingham has funding available for travel to North America, Brazil, Australia, China, India and Japan – our strategic priority regions. There are also specific funding opportunities for universities that are members of Universitas 21 (U21), as well as the BRIDGE seed fund with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The China Institute manages our engagement in China, and they have established a fund of up to £1,500 per visit for academics requiring support to further their research, develop existing relationships or establish new connections in China. Whilst in country, academics can also access logistical help and guidance from the China Institute’s Guangzhou-based China Office; logistical and financial support is also available for visits to Birmingham.

A collaborative fund has been established with Waseda University in Japan to support travel, networking and ancillary costs for applicants. The fund supports academics with research interests in the following academic areas: Shakespeare, Robotics, Computer Sciences, Sports Sciences, Social Sciences and Linguistics.

International Relations administers an ‘India Collaboration Fund’ that supports travel, and provides match funding for visits to and from India to develop collaborations. The fund enables the University to offer incoming student bursaries of up to £1,500, along with short-term fellowships for Indian Scholars wishing to visit the University. Fellows wishing to visit are eligible for up to four weeks of funding of £2,000 per week, which the host school or college can supplement if required.

The third round of the joint pump-priming research fund between the Universities of Birmingham and Nottingham, and FAPESP (the São Paulo Research Foundation) in Brazil is now open for applications. Proposals for collaboration are invited across all academic disciplines to support joint research projects between FAPESP-funded researchers from the state of São Paulo and researchers from Birmingham and Nottingham. Tripartite applications are preferred, but bipartite applications involving colleagues from UoB and Brazilian, FAPESP-eligible colleagues will also be considered. Full details can be found online at www.fapesp.br/en/10608. In addition, the Brazil Visiting Fellows Scheme is now open for applications, providing early-career university lecturers or post-doctoral researchers working at recognised universities in Brazil with the opportunity to spend up to three months at the University of Birmingham working on identified research projects.

Additional funding opportunities for academic and professional services staff are available as part of the Universitas 21 Staff Fellowships Awards, supporting the initiation of collaborative activities within the U21 network. These awards provide support of up to £5,000, and the programme aims to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills and encourage the sharing of best practice. The scheme provides support to Birmingham staff who have demonstrated innovation and excellence in their field, and who are likely to benefit from an extended period of professional development. The deadline for this year is 12 March 2017.

In addition to U21 funding for the University of Melbourne, there is also a dedicated Melbourne Travel Fund. This collaborative fund requires match funding, but will support travel, networking and other ancillary costs.

If academic members of staff would like to further their research in North America, they can apply to The North America Travel Fund. This provides match funding to support visits to or from the US and Canada. The fund aims to develop collaborations and will therefore cover costs incurred for transportation, visas and other incidentals. In addition to this, the University also offers funding for collaborative research and educational activities undertaken as part of our strategic partnership, known as the BRIDGE Alliance, with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The BRIDGE Seed Fund is a pump-priming fund designed to develop existing research relationships and provide support to allow our academics to build new collaborative research projects.

If you would like any more information on any of the international funding opportunities we offer, please visit the intranet: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/ris/research-funding/Internal-Funding.aspx or contact the relevant country officer for the region you are interested in visiting.
Green Supplier Fair and Ethical Market

The Procurement Team will be holding its third Green Supplier Fair and Ethical Market on Wednesday 15 February (during Go Green Week) in the Great Hall, 11.00am–3.00pm.

Our suppliers will demonstrate how they help the University to reduce its environmental impact, and you can buy locally/ethically produced goods from the market, plus have the opportunity to win a prize.

Staff Fundraising week is back!

Our annual Staff Fundraising Week will take place 13–17 February, concluding with the BUAFTA’s ceremony on 17 February. All proceeds from the sales of BUAFTA raffle tickets and all the exciting fundraising activities taking place during Staff Fundraising Week will go towards supporting miscarriage research taking place right here at the University.

So, the clock is ticking to turn your ideas into action. Start planning today; whether it is an office bake off or sponsored coffee runs – get your whole department involved to help us to help others by finding new ways to prevent pregnancy loss, and challenging misconceptions of miscarriage.

What do you need to do next? Let the Development and Alumni Relations Office know what you are planning so that they can assign you a rep and provide all the materials and information you will need to make your event a success. Please email fundraiseforus@contacts.bham.ac.uk or call Laura Bainbridge on 0121 414 8895.

This is a fantastic opportunity to support life-changing projects taking place right here on campus.

Stonewall TOP 100 EMPLOYER 2017

STONEWALL SUCCESS

The University of Birmingham has once again made it into the list of Stonewall Top 100 Employers in the Workplace Equality Index 2017, a national benchmarking tool that shows which UK workplaces are most inclusive for LGBTQ staff. The University ranks 75th out of over 430 organisations who took part in the assessment this year, and the Rainbow Network have also been recognised as a Highly Commended Network Group.

BIRMINGHAM ALUMNA AND PARALYMPIAN RECEIVES VICE-CHANCELLOR’S MEDAL

Just before Christmas, Physics alumna Pamela Relph returned to campus to receive a Vice-Chancellor’s medal from the Vice-Chancellor in recognition of her Paralympic achievements. Pamela graduated in 2011, and since graduating has won two Paralympic gold medals (in London 2012 and Rio 2016 Games) and five World Championship gold medals in the LTA mixed coxed fours.

Pamela was also awarded an MBE in 2013 for services to rowing, and is the only current international para-rower to be a double Paralympic Champion.

Dates for the diary

Vice-Chancellor’s Open Forum
Tuesday 14 February,
12.30–1.30pm,
Bramall Music Building.
The Vice-Chancellor will be interviewed by Mark Leach, founder, Editor in Chief and Director of Wonkhe, the higher education policy commentators, on key issues facing the higher education sector and the University.

Birmingham Professional Forum
Wednesday 8 March,
11.00am–12noon,
Bramall Music Building.
All staff are warmly invited to the forum, which is introduced by the Registrar and Secretary, Lee Sanders. The agenda will follow closer to the event.
The School of Engineering
‘NOW WE ARE ONE’

The School of Engineering, which brings together the disciplines of Civil, Mechanical, and Electronic, Electrical and Systems Engineering, celebrated its first birthday in January. The past year has seen significant changes on all fronts; in education, research, people and infrastructure, but alongside change has come some notable successes, including:

- Achieving top ten places for all three disciplines in the Guardian League Tables for 2017.
- A new, exciting and innovative curriculum offering for students, which includes a new shared first year and interdisciplinary project modules at undergraduate (UG) level. The changes enhance the student experience, offering greater opportunity for collaborative working across the disciplines, and helps them to develop the skills employers in industry are looking for.
- A new School Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC), which will continue to push and promote new developments and initiatives in the teaching of engineering. The TLC has already hosted a number of events to promote STEM projects and activities in the School (eg, on the academic readiness of incoming students) and is currently developing a set of key characteristics that will make up the ‘Birmingham Engineering graduate’.
- Integrating phase one of the new Collaborative Teaching Laboratory (CTL) into the UG curriculum, offering students access to cutting-edge laboratory facilities. Enhanced use of the CTL allows research from current projects to be demonstrated to students directly, and data used in teaching specific and targeted areas, eg, structural performance (using the inbuilt sensor capability within both the mezzanine floor in G47 and the high strength wall/floor in G50), sensor technology and dynamic responses.
- Collaborating with the Business School in the development of a suite of Advanced Engineering Management Programmes for entry from 2017/18.
- Establishing four new powerful research groups (Power and Infrastructure, Railways and Vehicle Technology, Communications and Sensing, and Manufacturing). These groupings cut across the Departments in the School and allow for greater ease of collaboration between researchers and the opportunity to develop and enhance links with industry and business. One of the School’s particular areas of interest is in the Global Challenges Research Fund, which supports cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries through challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research.
- Playing a lead role in the UK Collaboratorium for Research in Infrastructure and Cities (UKCRIC), which will include building a National Buried Infrastructure Facility (NBIF) here at Birmingham. The NBIF, to be completed by 2019, will be led by the Power and Infrastructure research group in the School of Engineering. The vision for UKCRIC is for the nation’s infrastructure to be more resilient to extreme events and more adaptable to changing circumstances and contexts, and able to provide services that are more affordable, accessible and usable to the whole population. The NBIF will enable assessment of fully instrumented buried pipes, culverts, shallow tunnels, barrier walls and other structures at or near full scale.
- A highly successful visit by the Joint Board of Moderators (JBM) which accredited all Civil Engineering programmes.
- The funding of an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) strategic equipment bid in the area of Terahertz Electronics for over £1 million, and another EPSRC grant on Remanufacturing for over £2 million over five years.

The School marked these achievements at a special one-year anniversary event, which took place on 18 January.
Shaping our Green Heart vision

Work to create our striking new parkland in the centre of our Edgbaston campus is now underway. The Green Heart will bring more than seven acres of new natural space to our University, and is on schedule for completion in 2019.

The University has worked in partnership with consultancy group, Nomad, to understand the needs of our staff, students and the wider community to make sure that the design of the new space is centred around you. Thank you to everyone who gave their views and ideas. Your suggestions have now been explored by the project team, and some key features have been confirmed for incorporation in the Green Heart.

Here are just some of the ways we are taking your ideas forward:

- A range of wild flowers and native plants, 160 new trees, water features and nesting sites
- Space for markets, performances and gatherings, including a grass auditorium
- A new café and bar
- Energy saving technologies, zoned lighting and energy generating paving
- Improved signage and access to information
- Dedicated areas for art, sculptures and the University’s collections

We will continue to take feedback as the journey unfolds. Get involved and send us your ideas or questions to greenheart@contacts.bham.ac.uk or visit the Green Heart FAQs and schedule at intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/green-heart

In December, we laid 10 paving samples in University Square outside the Law Building and over 500 people have voted for their favourite type. Keep an eye out for the results and the next polls online.
Birmingham Life Sciences Park

The University has purchased 9.9 acres of land at the site known as Battery Park, Aston Webb Boulevard in Selly Oak, and plans to work with partners to develop the site into a brand new Life Sciences Park. The development will include state-of-the-art research laboratories and commercial facilities for new and existing partners to come together, helping reinforce the city’s status as an internationally recognised hub for clinical academia.

The Birmingham Life Sciences Park will harness the academic, clinical and commercial strengths of Birmingham’s healthcare specialists in order to accelerate research development, taking innovative new healthcare technologies from the early stages of concept to real life application for improved patient care. This will build on the Birmingham Health Partners philosophy to deliver the full circle of translational medicine, from drug development to real world studies, to promote healthy living through maintaining quality of life and developing new treatments for disease. We are already tackling cancer, chronic and rare diseases, dementia, trauma and antibiotic resistance.

The Birmingham Life Sciences Park will contribute to the broader life sciences expertise and infrastructure across the West Midlands and help establish Birmingham as a leading economic hub for life sciences. There are already 22,000 people employed in the sector across the region, and more than 600 companies working in this area. The development of the site will give industry greater access to leading research and the opportunity to develop their own facility spaces. This will give our local enterprises the edge in a competitive sector and promote job creation. Our vision is to attract the establishment of new SMEs and investment from large pharma and biotechnology firms.

The Alan Walters Building

Birmingham Business School’s brand new Postgraduate Teaching Centre opened its doors to students in autumn 2016. Based alongside Pritchatt’s Road, the £10 million centre is devoted to the teaching of postgraduate courses. The building is called the Alan Walters Building after the noted economist of the same name.

Opening our new Library

Our new Library will be officially opened on Monday 13 February by Dame Lynne Brindley at a prestigious ceremony on campus. Dame Brindley’s profession prior to becoming Master of Pembroke College, Oxford, was as a professional librarian when, among other positions, she served as the first female Chief Executive of the British Library.

A new home for students

The University’s £20 million new hall of residence near the Grange Road gate is scheduled to open its doors to students in September 2017. Work is rapidly progressing on the 178 student bedrooms, as the building construction now reaches its highest point. In addition to the 34 flats, the building will house a brand new café, open to the local community, a sports pavilion and a dedicated accommodation office. The new building will add to the vibrant atmosphere of the Selly Oak area and promote a community-led University ethos.

Finishing touches for our new sports centre

We look forward to welcoming our members to the new state-of-the-art facility very soon. You can sign up for memberships now, including peak and off-peak by contacting sales@360birmingham.co.uk, 0121 414 2056/0121 415 8732 or visiting our Sales Hub in the Munrow Sports Centre. Get your membership now to be one of the first to use the new facility and secure your exclusive staff rate.

To keep up to date with all of our campus developments please visit the University campus developments web page: www.birmingham.ac.uk/building
LGBT History Month

LGBT History Month is observed across the UK each February. The University has teamed up with the Staff Rainbow Network and the Guild of Students to organise a series of thought-provoking events that are open to all visitors: staff, students, friends, and the wider community, whether or not they identify as LGBT.

The national theme for LGBT History Month 2017 is ‘Law and Citizenship’, reflecting the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in the UK. The University has organised events in this theme to mark the progress that has been made in the last 50 years, while considering some of the legal obstacles that continue to affect LGBT people. Our aim is to inform people about these obstacles and get them to think about how they can support their LGBT friends and colleagues to overcome them.

Ensuring equality is integral to the University’s objectives, and participating in national events such as LGBT History Month is a fantastic way to promote the work and successes of members of our diverse staff and student population while affirming our dedication to creating a fair and inclusive environment.

Professor Una Martin, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Equality

LGBT History Month is an important time of year for LGBT people to remember some of the great people who have helped to shape our journey. Of course, there is still a way to go on this journey, and I am pleased to be able to work with the University to organise a programme of fascinating events as part of this national commemoration of LGBT culture, and get people thinking about where we go from here.

Philippa Treharne-Jones, Chair of the Staff Rainbow Network

The Cadbury Research Library, which hosts the Noel Coward Archive among its treasures, will be offering a unique perspective on the life of this fascinating man, followed by a screening of his film ‘The Italian Job’. The Barber Institute of Fine Arts will also be running their popular ‘Sexuality, Identity and Ambiguity’ gallery tour and hosting a special lecture by Dr Greg Salter entitled ‘Francis Bacon and the Queer Spaces of Intimacy’.

Comedienne and actress Clare Summerskill will be visiting campus to talk about her recent play, ‘Rights of Passage’, which explores the unique challenges faced by LGBT asylum seekers, based on the accounts and experiences of real individuals.

The University aims to support and empower people from any background. Our LGBT staff and students are an asset, and we are committed to working with them to make our campus a safe and welcoming place that we can be proud of. The LGBT History Month theme of Law and Citizenship presents an opportunity to draw on academic expertise across the University and host events that raise awareness of some of the barriers still faced by many LGBT people, but also celebrate their achievements and how far they have come.

Professor Tim Jones, Provost and Vice-Principal

For a full events listing, visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/lgbt2017

If you would like to get involved with organising future LGBT History Months or any other Equality and Diversity events, contact equality@contacts.bham.ac.uk

To join the Staff Rainbow Network, contact lgbtq@contacts.bham.ac.uk or visit intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/raingonetwork
The University of Birmingham’s Arts & Science Festival returns 13–19 March 2017 for a week of exhibitions, screenings, concerts, workshops and talks. This year’s theme, land and water, draws together leading artists and academics in a celebration of culture, research and collaboration at the University.

The festival offers a diverse mix of things to see and do. Festival talks explore a wide range of topics, from climate change to immigration; from the ocean floor to the way our brain interprets landscape art. An imaginative programme of workshops encourages visitors to get hands-on, from an artist-led walk inviting participants to consider their relationship to water to a three course, lab-based demonstration, which draws links between hydrogen fuel cells and a traditional soup recipe!

For 2017, Arts & Science Festival is pleased to announce a brand new partnership with Shock & Gore Festival, who present their hilarious Trash Film Night, an evening of terrible film complete with ill-prepared commentary at The Electric Cinema. This event forms part of an eclectic mix of screenings including advance previews and a mini-programme of events inspired by Homer’s Odyssey at film venues across the city (Electric Cinema, mac Birmingham, and Mockingbird Cinema and Kitchen).

A vibrant exhibitions programme approaches the festival theme from a variety of perspectives. Ikon Gallery presents the first solo exhibition of work by the pioneering French film director and biologist Jean Painlevé. Birmingham Open Media presents In Future Forest — a collaboration between sound artist and composer Dr Robin Price and environmental scientist Dr Francis Pope, who explore the creative possibilities of mapping nature into music.

Back on campus, the University of Birmingham is transformed into a hive of activity. Museums across campus host exhibitions, workshops and more, including a behind the scenes tour of the newly refurbished Lapworth Museum of Geology, a magical exhibition of fable illustrations at Winterbourne House and Garden, and a cross-disciplinary workshop exploring landscape art through drawing and writing at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

From land to water, artist’s talks to hands-on workshops, magic lanterns to independent film, Arts & Science Festival 2017 has something for everyone. But don’t take our word for it — view the full programme at www.birmingham.ac.uk/artsandsciencefestival.

Email: artsandscience@contacts.bham.ac.uk to join our mailing list!

For full programme details please visit www.birmingham.ac.uk/artsandsciencefestival
WHAT COULD A TRUMP PRESIDENCY MEAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION?

PROFESSOR ROBIN MASON, PRO-VICE-CHANCELLOR FOR INTERNATIONAL, SHARES HIS THOUGHTS WITH BUZZ ON WHAT THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION COULD MEAN FOR HIGHER EDUCATION.

On January 20 2017, Donald J. Trump became America’s 45th President. Donald Trump ran an anti-establishment campaign promising changes under the slogan ‘Make America Great Again’. He has expressed a desire to shake up Washington, but has given few clues or details as to how he will do that. He said even less throughout his presidential campaign about higher education, and speculation about what he will do about university education runs wild.

One issue that the President has declared his hand on is affordability of education. This has become a critical problem in the US (and increasingly in the UK as well). The cost of college education has increased dramatically; by a factor of 12.5 times since 1978, while average wages and other prices have risen only by a factor of three. Trump has stated: ‘You graduate from college and you’re starting out with like an anchor around your neck. No good. It’s no good.’

Trump’s response has been to promise to exert pressure for colleges to cut tuition fees. One cause of expensive tuition is, in his view, ‘administrative bloat’. He has declared that he would ‘take steps to drive down college costs by reducing the unnecessary costs of compliance with federal regulations so that colleges can pass on the savings to students in the form of lower tuition’. At the same time, he made clear that there could be consequences if those savings are not passed on - consequences that could include abolishing the tax-exempt status of large endowments.

The President has also trailed the idea of tweaking the student loan repayment scheme. As things stand, more than 5 million borrowers in the US are currently enrolled in an income-based repayment plan.

The Obama administration set a cap on debt payments: graduates have to pay no more than 10% of their income. Any debt not repaid after 20 years is forgiven.

Trump’s proposal is to shift the terms to a cap of 12.5% of income with outstanding balances wiped after 15 years.

While the repayment plan has broad support from both Democrats and Republicans, some higher education advocates go further. They argue that to promote affordability and increase access for lower-income students, support for the Federal Pell Grant Program should be increased; and that Trump should work with Congress and his Education Secretary to ensure the programme continues to receive annual increases (the Federal Pell Grant Program provides need-based grants to low-income students. Unlike a loan, a Federal Pell Grant does not have to be repaid).

Neither move seems likely. In fact, all the indications point to Trump’s lack of support for increasing the $160 billion the federal government spends on higher education.

Nor is he likely to encourage the individual states to increase funding to university institutions. As for working with his Education Secretary: Trump is on record as saying that he would like to shut down the US Department of Education.

In addition, US universities are watching closely to see what effect the mood created during the election campaign will have on recruitment of international students. The President aired some strong views about immigration – talking about ‘extreme vetting’ – and the need to protect US borders. The US is the most popular country for international students (followed by the UK and Australia), with 19% of students studying abroad choosing to do so in the US (10% come to the UK, 6% to Australia). This amounts to over 1 million international students in the US in the last academic year. US universities have come to rely heavily on these students for their financial health, in addition to the academic and cultural benefits. Any risks to international student recruitment are keenly felt by US universities.

Finally, it will be fascinating to see how cultural tensions play out. US universities tend to be liberal in outlook. Some are struggling to come to terms with what they see as a lurch to the right. There is work to be done to bridge the divide; but that is, after all, a key role that universities should play in societies where divisions have opened up. Given the parallels with UK universities and Brexit, we shall all watch with interest.

Things to look out for in Trump’s Presidency:
1 What pressure will be brought to bear for universities to keep tuition fee increases to a minimum?
2 Will Trump reverse support for funding that is aimed at widening participation in US universities?
3 Will international student recruitment dip, to the benefit of Canada, Australia and (possibly) the UK?
4 What role will US universities play in resolving the political tensions in the country?
The University of Birmingham’s links with China grow stronger and deeper – demonstrated by our Vice-Chancellor’s latest visit to the country.

**CHINA: ON TRACK TO SUCCESS**

Professor Sir David Eastwood recently travelled to Beijing to open a prestigious joint workshop with the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), which laid the foundation for joint research that could help to solve major problems facing both countries.

Research specialists in the area of environmental and earth sciences from Birmingham and Beijing kick-started a partnership that will investigate areas such as air pollution, nano-materials and environmental genomics – or how people’s genetic health responds to environmental challenges.

Experts discussed future collaboration in areas such as river ecosystems, geological problems, such as tectonic movement, and using fossil research to better understand how past environments can help us tackle current climate issues.

The scheme will see 20–30 PhD students recruited jointly by Birmingham and SUSTech each year in a wide range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

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And such is the strong bond between the two institutions that just two weeks after Sir David opened the Beijing workshop with former Vice-President of CAS Professor Jinghai Li, experts from the Chinese research hub jetted to Birmingham to continue discussions.

Researchers met on campus to explore ways in which to combine expertise in chemistry, hydrology, toxicology and biology to solve problems associated with pollutants that are increasingly threatening China’s natural fresh water ecosystems that over 1.3 billion people depend on.

The UK visit also saw University of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (UCAS) representatives agree in principle to work with their Birmingham counterparts to establish a postgraduate programme that will see students awarded joint PhD and Masters degrees from both universities.

While in China, Sir David also signed an agreement with Beijing Jiaotong University (BJTU) for research experts to work together on developing technology to help make railways safer and more efficient.

Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education (BCCRE) is a world leader in railway research and education, while BJTU is a prestigious Chinese university with a particular strength in railway engineering.

Both universities will continue their successful partnership and strengthen education links that will allow Chinese rail engineering students to study at Birmingham, benefiting from the University’s expertise – particularly in railway control and safety.

The scheme will see 20–30 PhD students recruited jointly by Birmingham and SUSTech each year in a wide range of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

The University sponsored the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra’s (CBSO) first tour of China and the Vice-Chancellor attended the final concert in Beijing, after hosting a special reception for some of the University’s friends and partners in China.

The sponsorship reflected the University’s rich history of musical education and research, which stretches back to 1905 and its first professor of music – revered English composer Sir Edward Elgar. Birmingham has a strong musical connection with China, as the first original Chinese violin composition was *Difficult Road (Xinglu Nan)*, composed in 1919 by famous geology alumnus Li Siguang.

Following engagements in Beijing, the Vice-Chancellor flew to Shenzhen to visit the University of Science and Technology of China (SUSTech), where he met Professor Shiyi Chen, President of SUSTech to hold further discussions around an agreement to develop a split-site PhD programme.

Sir David said: ‘The University of Birmingham is proud to work with our partners in China to find common solutions to shared problems. As a global ‘civic’ university, we have a responsibility to enrich the life of people in both our home city and the wider world.

‘Our experts are working with peers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences to map out an exciting research pathway for future development, while our partnership with Beijing Jiaotong University marks the start of even closer collaboration on railway research that will ultimately benefit communities in China, Britain and across the world.

‘Our partnerships with CAS, BJTU and SUSTech are testament to our growing reputation in China, as our experts work with their Chinese counterparts to deliver high-quality research and education with world-wide impact.’
The University recognises the increasing importance of generating income and impact through collaboration with industry as a key part of its strategy — Making Important Things Happen. Integral to the success of such ambitions is the growth of industry partnerships and the profile-raising of the business engagement and commercialisation activities that the University is involved with.

The changing landscape of research funding in the UK means that awards generated from partnerships with business are a growing source of income. The Business Engagement (BE) team’s purpose is to accelerate industry and academic research collaborations with the ultimate goal of providing our academics with a diversified income and greater impact for their research outputs, while supporting industry as it continues to innovate and grow. In 2015/16 the University received £9.2 million in UK industry research awards. This is close to a 50% increase on the 2013/14 awards – the year in which the BE team was assembled.

BE works with key regional, national and international partners to develop academic-industry links and strategic business partnerships. Their aim is not only generating income, but also positive reputation and research impact. To achieve this, BE work closely with colleagues in Research and Innovation Services and Alta Innovations to grow commercial partnerships and ensure consistency of the external ‘business message’.

Business Engagement Partners (BEPs), embedded within the Colleges, work with academics to develop and grow relationships with business. By identifying challenges of mutual interest they link academia to companies in their area of research, broker the development of project proposals and assist in the preparation of commercial contracts for project collaboration. BE also help to identify suitable funding mechanisms and advise on business case and project planning. Engagement with industry needs to be easy for both the academics and businesses. However, there are a number of steps in the process flow, and this is where the BE team are integral in helping to streamline the process for all parties, allowing academics to focus on their research rather than administrative tasks.

As a result of the robust support provided throughout these activities, over 230 academics across the institution have been actively engaged on UK industry contracts since 2013.

Some of the projects the team are currently supporting include: The Quantum Hub in Sensors and Metrology; the Energy Research Accelerator; The High Temperature Research Centre in partnership with Rolls-Royce; The Institute of Translational Medicine; and a three-way collaborative memorandum of understanding between the University of Birmingham, Twycross Zoo, and the University of Nottingham. The work of the team spans internationally, with a dedicated BEP working on cultivating exciting opportunities in China in the field of Rail, Energy Storage and Nuclear.

In addition to the BEP roles, a dedicated marketing and events function within the team is responsible for raising the profile of the University’s ‘offer’ to business and supporting the growth of the pipeline. They design and deliver bespoke marketing campaigns and events, and manage communication channels to promote the University to existing and potential industry partners. Each year the team organises a business networking event hosted by the Vice-Chancellor at his Meadowcroft residence. This high-level event is a celebration of our partnerships with industry.

The University has a desire to promote and raise awareness of its research strengths to business and establish itself as the destination of choice for expertise in research and teaching. This requires the University to

We are keen to break down the perception that collaborating with industry is not as attractive as receiving funding from research organisations.
develop its culture of business engagement and to broaden its ambitions for impact and income. BE can support academics and enhance impact for the next Research Excellence Framework assessment by initiating, developing, and maximising research relationships with external stakeholders. The team are involved in a number of longlisted Impact Case Studies across the Colleges.

Gurmit Kler, Head of Business Engagement, thinks that engaging with industry has an even wider range of advantages for individuals and for the University: ‘It is about creating a culture where industry collaboration is promoted and celebrated. In our experience academics are more than willing to engage, if not for the lack of time, or often know-how, to do so. The team spend a great deal of time building networks and relationships internally and externally and, as highlighted by the Dowling Review of Business-University Research Collaboration (July 2015), have found that people are central to successful collaborations. The need to engage in conversation and having time to do so is critically important. Researchers from all disciplines and stages in their career are encouraged to seek out their BEP to maximise these opportunities.

‘We are keen to break down the perception that collaborating with industry is not as attractive as receiving funding from research organisations. Industry collaboration can offer significantly more income contribution, as well as translational and supplemental collaboration opportunities. This can, in turn, support and increase the chances of securing research council awards, as many of these bids require researchers to create pathways to impact.’

Professor Serafin Bakalis, University Academic Fellow in the School of Chemical Engineering and Academic Lead for the University’s partnership with Procter and Gamble, has been working with the BE team since their formation in 2013, and agrees that it is vital to have support with the management of industry partnerships: ‘I find the team helpful in allowing me to focus on academic work by taking ownership of many of the administrative aspects of industry engagement, and our interactions are always friendly and productive.’

In the past three years, the University has worked with 159 different UK companies on collaborative research contracts, and the BE team has helped to develop a number of new strategic partners. In collaboration with academics, the team are working to maximise research income by looking for cross-College or institution-wide projects, as well as other opportunities such as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programmes and furthering the enrichment of the student experience.

Professor Tim Dafforn from the School of Biosciences has extensive experience of collaborating with businesses and is currently Chief Scientific Adviser to The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Commenting on the importance of business engagement, Professor Dafforn said, ‘Working collaboratively with business has become an ever more important part of academic life. The BE team make this easy, providing high-quality support for all aspects of the process’.

If you would like to discuss opportunities for collaborating with business, you can contact your College BEP who will be happy to advise you. If you are unsure of where to start, send an email to businessteam@contacts.bham.ac.uk and one of the team will point you in the right direction.

Keep in touch

@UoBBWB

www.linkedin.com/company/university-of-birmingham-business-engagement
On 9 January, we commenced the committee stage of The Higher Education and Research Bill in the House of Lords.

The first amendment took over two and a half hours to debate and, unusually for the Committee Stage of the Bill, there was a vote, one which the government lost 248–221! If this amendment eventually finds its way on to the face of the Bill, it will be the first time in history that a university is defined in an Act of Parliament.

The proposed clause states, ‘(1) UK universities are autonomous institutions and must uphold the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech. (2) UK universities must ensure that they promote freedom of thought and expression, and freedom from discrimination. (3) UK universities must provide an extensive range of high quality academic subjects delivered by excellent teaching, supported by scholarship and research, through courses which enhance the ability of students to learn throughout their lives. (4) UK universities must make a contribution to society through the pursuit, dissemination, and application of knowledge and expertise locally, nationally and internationally; and through partnerships with business, charitable foundations, and other organisations, including other colleges and universities. (5) UK universities must be free to act as critics of government and the conscience of society.’

Before speaking in the Second Reading of the Bill I consulted our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood, who is, as we know, one of the most respected figures in higher education globally. He said, ‘The UK has a co-regulatory approach that has maintained the autonomy of universities and relies on their own governance arrangements where appropriate, allowing universities such as Birmingham to be flexible and responsive to the needs of their students and employers, including shaping the curriculum in the light of the latest research findings, to think long term about global challenges and remain free from direct political interference. It is vital that that cornerstone of UK higher education is preserved throughout the Bill.’

At the University of Birmingham I am proud to say that we fulfil each of the five criteria defining a university in the proposed amendment.

What is it?

Mrs Alice Beale, Joseph Edward Southall (1861–1944), 1914, Campus Collection of Fine and Decorative Art, Research and Cultural Collections.

Where is it?

University House.

The Campus Collection of Fine and Decorative Art developed soon after the foundation of the University of Birmingham, when it commissioned portraits of distinguished University figures by acclaimed artists. These works of art are displayed throughout departments and public spaces across the campuses of the University. A number of influential women from the University’s history are represented through these portraits, including this month’s focus, Alice Beale.

Alice Beale was a pioneer of social service and the first president of the Birmingham Settlement. As wife of the first Vice-Chancellor of the University, Charles Gabriel Beale, she was instrumental in creating University House, the first purpose-built hall of residence for women in Britain. She also chaired the Executive committee along with Charlotte Chamberlain.

The artist, Joseph Southall, has focused on the sitter’s face and hands, using tiny lines of pencil and pastel to build up a detailed portrait which appears both strong and gentle. The clothing and flowers are reduced to outlines and patterns – decorative motifs and patterning in an Arts and Crafts style.

Learn more

You can find out more about Alice Beale and Research and Cultural Collections’ International Women’s Day activities by visiting the blog: http://rcc-redmarley.tumblr.com/
Our regular feature gives Buzz readers a quick tour of the latest University news hitting the headlines and activity among our online community.

**in the news...**

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

Dr Grace Turner’s paper on the ‘missed opportunities’ in primary care for stroke prevention was covered by The Times, The Telegraph, The Independent and Daily Mail while Professor Pam Kears discussed childhood cancer on BBC Breakfast.

The University’s involvement in the UK/UAE 2017 year of cultural collaboration and HRH, the Prince of Wales’s presentation of a facsimile of the Birmingham Qur’an to the Crown Prince, made the front-page of the BBC website and was covered by all major news outlets in the region.

A two-day research workshop on smart cities and microbial infection in partnership with Panjab University was featured in more than 30 Indian media outlets.

The Daily Mail, Daily Mirror and a number of international outlets were among those captivated by news that a team of archaeologists led by Dr Martin Bommas have found ‘compelling evidence’ of new pharaonic tombs in Egypt.

Professor Jim Orford discussed the dangers of online gambling on BBC Radio 4’s You and Yours. Professor Francis Davis was on the panel for BBC Radio 4’s ‘Beyond Belief’, discussing the changing landscape of churchgoing in the UK. Professor Bob Stone’s pioneering work in augmented reality, which will form the backbone of the Mayflower 400 celebrations, was the subject of a feature in The Telegraph.

Professor Jon Glasby discussed the outlook for social care with BBC Breakfast while Dr Robin Miller spoke to regional BBC radio stations on the effect of cuts to social care funding on local NHS trust deficits.

Professor Simon Collinson spoke to the Times Education Supplement and The Independent about the impact of Brexit on the attendance of EU-national students at business schools.

Following Donald Trump’s victory in the US election, Professor Scott Lucas appeared on BBC Breakfast four times as well as a range of other national and international outlets. Dr Adam Quinn was interviewed on the same subject by BBC News, BBC Radio 5 Live, and a number of regional BBC radio stations.

In the run up to Christmas we asked current international staff and students to share how they say ‘Happy Christmas’, demonstrating the true global fabric of our campus.

They wrote their messages on white boards, and we captured images and video clips of them saying their greeting. Their messages were then featured across our social channels, encouraging others to share how they would say Happy Christmas in their native language, using the hashtag #uobchristmas.

A gallery of the video clips on our Instagram channel gained more than 4.5K views.

A gallery of the image clips on our Facebook and LinkedIn channels saw us reach countries across the world, including the Middle East, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, Japan, Africa and Sri Lanka. These two posts alone received more than 600 ‘reactions’.

Our University School conference attracted visits from journalists at The Times and the TES and appeared in several reports in the Daily Telegraph while our decision to purchase the site of the first municipal bank was reported by BBC 1 West Midlands, the Birmingham Post and What’s On.

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

in my own words

Professor Jon Frampton is the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for China and Director of the China Institute.

I grew up in Wimborne Minster, a small market town in Dorset, and attended the local comprehensive school. I went on to study Biochemistry at Oxford, and undertook my PhD in the MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Cambridge. My first post-doc was at the Beatson Institute in Glasgow, followed by an EMBO Fellowship, eventually leading to a staff position, at the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) in Heidelberg. I returned from Germany to take up a post in the Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine in Oxford as a Wellcome Trust Senior Fellow. I finally arrived in Birmingham in 2003, becoming Professor of Stem Cell Biology and then Director of Research for the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. As a result of my increasing involvement with the University’s work in China, I was invited to the position of Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for China and Director of the China Institute. Given the importance of China to Birmingham, I was more than happy to accept.

Working in China is simultaneously challenging and rewarding. There are of course differences in culture, which can make travelling to and engaging with China daunting for some, yet for the intrepid, the sheer potential presented by the quality of research, and willingness of our partners to collaborate, can be immense.

While my initial experience of China tended to be focused around my discipline, my new role now affords me the opportunity to work with a range of academics across the University and to witness first-hand the truly amazing work being conducted, much of which is aimed at tackling some of the greatest challenges humanity faces that present themselves in China in epic fashion. One of the more enjoyable aspects of the role is meeting, and being able to help, such a diverse range of colleagues, from those seeking help to initiate engagements with China, to those requiring institutional support for existing projects and partnerships.

I have been nothing short of inspired by the breadth and depth of our collaborations in China, both in research and in education. For example, we held UoB days in October in partner institutions in Tianjin and Wuhan, attended by a broad range of our academics who were able to promote their research and outline education opportunities for students from the Chinese universities to continue their studies at Birmingham.

In November we helped broker an agreement between our Shakespeare Institute and one of China’s leading publishing houses based in Nanjing. Throughout 2016 we helped to support our colleagues in MDS who are taking the lead in training of GP trainers in China, crucial to reducing the burden on China’s hospitals. In January this year the China Institute helped to organise a joint UoB/Chinese Academy of Sciences workshop on Environmental and Earth Sciences, which focused on a number of topics including air pollution, a particular challenge in Beijing. In the same trip, the China Institute worked alongside a delegation from the Railways Group within EPS, whose research with local partners is helping to improve the safety, reliability, and efficiency of rail networks across China. Finally, in September this year we will launch our first undergraduate programmes delivered by flying faculty together with our partners in Jinan National University (JNU). Whilst setting this partnership up hasn’t been without challenges, it’s been a pleasure to work through these alongside colleagues in the School of Mathematics.

During a recent visit to Beijing, the British Council remarked: ‘Birmingham does it different’. I’m proud to say that I agree, and that I believe this to be a big compliment. They were referring to the way we do business and the basic principles that underpin our activity. These principles are: working closely with quality partners, be they institutions, government agencies, or commercial entities, to pursue excellent outcomes in research or education; ensuring that our engagements are based on mutual respect and mutual benefit, so that they are sustainable long term; and helping to raise awareness of the work undertaken in China, and through this transparency ensure that opportunities to cross cultivate partnerships aren’t missed and that the University’s international profile benefits.

As the Year of the Monkey draws to a close and the Rooster beckons I take time to reflect on our research and education successes. Alongside these successes I would add the reshaping of the China Institute as an achievement in its own right. The Institute draws upon the expertise and skills of academics and professional service staff from across the University who have led the way in engaging with China. The contribution of the China Institute Board, and of course of my Deputy, Professor Zhibing Zhang, has been invaluable in terms of ensuring that energy and resource is deployed to ensure the best outcomes, the collective experience being channelled to help people develop a partnership as they wish. Aside from such advice and guidance, the China Institute provides direct support such as the travel fund and logistical assistance from the China Office based in Guangzhou.

Juggling my time between a leadership role at the University and my research interests in stem cell biology can be quite a challenge, so I value the time I get to unwind with my family and pursue my hobbies. These include fishing, gardening, inventive cooking, and last but not least Nordic Noir, about which I am verging on the fanatical!