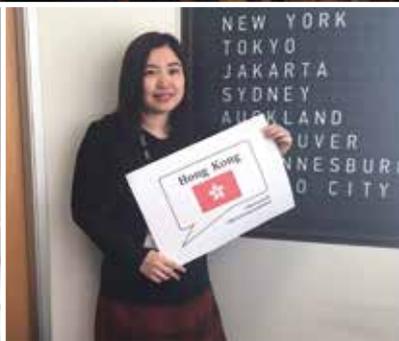
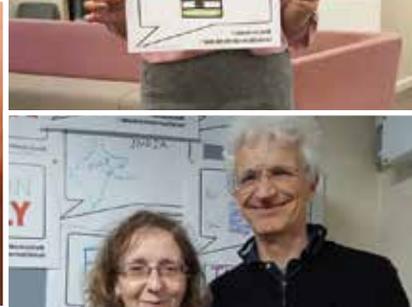


# buzz



June/July 2019

# #WeAreInternational

# #WeAreUoB



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

# Vice-Chancellor's *view*



Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood

## YOUR BUZZ

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### Your details

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Views expressed in the magazine are not necessarily those of the University or a statement of University policy. All submissions may be subject to editing. The Editor's decision is final.

Front cover image: Celebrating the #WeAreInternational #WeAreUoB campaign

Most universities now claim to be international, but few genuinely are. Higher education has become global: students travel, academic faculty have never been more mobile, the biggest research facilities are multinational. Ideas from – and people who work in – universities travel the world.

There are few universities now that do not have students from other jurisdictions. In most universities, at least some faculty are foreign nationals. In most places, at least a few students are on exchange programmes. But these do not, of themselves, amount to a university being an international university.

To be genuinely an international university, the values and work of the university must be suffused by global perspectives and an easily-worn internationalism. The activities of the university and its student body must embrace the richness and diversity of global differences passionately and creatively. The faculty of an international university must represent the cosmopolitanism and openness of the world of ideas. In short, the culture of an international university not only transcends the national but it enthusiastically embraces the global.

Moreover, to be an international university in an age where there is a resurgence in nationalism involves universities embodying some values which are counter-cultural. It involves universities proclaiming the values of mobile populations against those who decry migration. It involves universities celebrating and exploring their difference, where others might seek to find refuge in the safety of the familiar. Above all, perhaps, it requires that universities proclaim the value of freedom of movement of ideas and people where others might wish to build walls.

As long ago as our 2010 University Strategy, we committed ourselves to being a global university. We did not do this to deny or to distance ourselves from our civic roots. Rather, we did it precisely because we understood that there was a complementarity between our place in our city and country, and our place in a global

community. We did it because we were founded when Birmingham was one of the few genuinely global cities. We did it because of our conviction that the great universities of the future must be international.

Since then, we have travelled a long way. We have partnered around the globe. We have substantially increased the number of international students. We are increasingly making student exchange a key feature of academic study at Birmingham. We continue to recruit the best talent and take pride in the fact that around a third of our academic faculty are non-UK nationals. To study in Birmingham, to work in Birmingham, is to be part of a global community. Thus, even for our students who do not travel to study abroad, they study in a rich international environment.

The benefits of this global strategy are evident. We now teach some of the best mathematicians in China. Our Dubai campus is taking, for the first time, the qualities and values of a global top 100 university to the heart of Dubai's academic city. We share post-doctoral fellowships and research studentships with some of the best universities in Urbana-Champaign and in Melbourne. We are a key member of the leading international network of universities, Universitas 21, and others increasingly look to us as an exemplar of what it means to be an international university. I am now often told that we have activities and partnerships in more Chinese cities than any other UK university.

Something of this is captured in our Quest Campaign, which takes Birmingham people and Birmingham research not just to the global academic community but also beyond that to those who need to engage with our research for policy, cultural, and economic benefit.

In celebrating what we have achieved internationally, and in taking pride in our

BIRMINGHAM GLOBAL

INDIA

## COOLING CONGRESS *SUMMARY*

The second Clean Cooling Congress, hosted collaboratively between the University of Birmingham, Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation, World Bank Group and BEIS over April 24–25, led important discussions about promoting clean and energy efficient cold-chains in India.

Pawanexh Kohli, Visiting Professor at the University and CEO of the National Centre for Cold-chain Development commented:

*'Cold-chains enhance economic wealth, cash flow and security for farmers and improve food quality, safety and value to the customer, but they must achieve this with minimum environmental impact. Whilst we can reduce the loss of food in the delivery chain through use of technology, existing cold-chain is an energy-intensive application, often relying on diesel to provide off-grid and on-vehicle cooling – this is not good for the planet.'*

Professor Kohli also shared his visions for the future of accessible and sustainable cooling through community-orientated shared cooling facilities.

congress with a networking evening reception hosted in IMechE's Marble Hall.

Following the two-day event, the CII delegation had the opportunity to visit the Manufacturing Technology Centre, Productiv and Tyseley Energy Park before arriving on campus to visit T-ERA and for briefings of cooling research currently ongoing at Birmingham by Dr Raya Al-Dadah and Professor Yulong Ding.



*The second Clean Cooling Congress hosted collaboratively between the University of Birmingham, Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation, World Bank Group and BEIS*

*continued from page 2*

being a genuine global university, there is still much more to do. There is more that we should do around integration. There is more we should do to recognise and to support the diversity of needs that arise in a diverse international student body. There is more that we need to do to help to align funders and funding so that international research groups located here at Birmingham can have access to the resources that they need to underpin their research. We need to continue to work with, and to challenge, our government to embrace a fully open approach to international student recruitment. In the passionate strains of the Brexit debate, we need to remind our fellow citizens of the importance of being a country which is open, not inward looking. These, and many other challenges, are in front of us.

As we confront these challenges and continue to develop Birmingham as a global university, we can take heart from the last decade. **In so doing we will also be able to mobilise the resources and ingenuity of the University to continue to help meet the great global challenges that confront our generation and the next.**

*Vice-Chancellor,  
Professor Sir David Eastwood*

The congress returned for a second year as a global event around sustainable, accessible cooling for all who need it, without over-heating the planet.

Effective refrigeration is essential to preserve food and medicine. It underpins industries and economic growth, while air conditioning is key to sustainable urbanisation and human productivity and makes much of the world bearable – or even safe – to live in.

The problems in India are acute, where up to 50% of food is lost post-harvest because of a lack of cold-chain. The University, MP Ensystems and Shakti Sustainable Energy Foundation report on clean cooling highlights that only 4% of produce that would benefit from a cold-chain actually does so, compared with around 70% in the UK.

During the congress, Dr Ashok Dalwai, Chairman of the Committee on Doubling Farmers' Income and CEO of the National Rainfed Area Authority, Government of India, spoke about how vital developing clean cooling technologies is to prevent food waste and to work towards India's agricultural goals.

The Clean Cooling Congress had representatives from governments, manufacturers and research and development organisations. Our guests also included the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) visiting delegation. The India Institute and Birmingham Energy Institute then received all participants of the

# Research [IN FOCUS]

## UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COULD INCREASE CHANCES OF A SUCCESSFUL PREGNANCY

Research, led by the University, has found that giving progesterone to pregnant women with early pregnancy bleeding and a history of miscarriage could increase their chances of having a baby.

According to Dr Adam Devall, Senior Clinical Trial Fellow at the University of Birmingham and Manager of Tommy's National Centre for Miscarriage Research: *'Miscarriage is a common complication in pregnancy, affecting one-in-five women, with vaginal bleeding in early pregnancy associated with a one-in-three risk of miscarriage.'*

Adam explains: *'Several small studies have suggested that administering progesterone, a hormone essential for maintaining a pregnancy, may reduce the risk of miscarriage in women presenting with early pregnancy bleeding.'*

*'The PRISM trial was undertaken to answer a very important research question; whether progesterone given to pregnant women with threatened miscarriage would increase the number of babies born after at least 34 weeks of gestation when compared with a placebo.'*

The trial took place in 48 hospitals across the UK. The largest ever trial of its kind, it involved 4,153 pregnant women (with an average age of 31) who presented with early pregnancy bleeding.

The women were randomly assigned by computer into one of two groups – one group of 2,079 women were given progesterone, while the other group of 2,074 women were given a placebo.

## WHAT DID THE RESULTS SHOW?

The research did not show statistically strong enough evidence to suggest that progesterone could help all women who are suffering early pregnancy bleeding to go on to have a baby, but importantly the results did show the hormone benefitted those who had early pregnancy bleeding and had previously suffered a miscarriage.

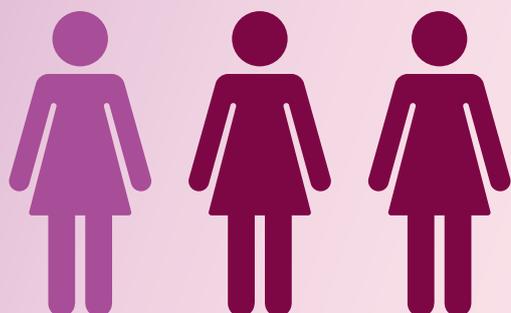
There was a 4% increase in the number of babies born to the women in the study who were given progesterone and had previously had one or two miscarriages compared to those given a placebo. The benefit was even greater for the women who had previous 'recurrent miscarriages' (ie, three or more miscarriages) – with a 15% increase in the live birth rate in the progesterone group compared to the placebo group.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Arri Coomarasamy, Professor of Gynaecology at the University of Birmingham and Director of Tommy's National Centre for Miscarriage Research, explains:

*'Our finding has huge implications for practice. This treatment could save thousands of babies who may have otherwise been lost to a miscarriage.'*

*'We hope that this evidence will be considered by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and that it will be used to update national guidelines for women at risk of miscarriage.'*



**'MISCARRIAGE IS A COMMON COMPLICATION IN PREGNANCY, AFFECTING ONE-IN-FIVE WOMEN, WITH VAGINAL BLEEDING IN EARLY PREGNANCY ASSOCIATED WITH A ONE-IN-THREE RISK OF MISCARRIAGE.'**



**15%  
INCREASE**

IN THE LIVE BIRTH RATE  
IN THE PROGESTERONE  
GROUP COMPARED TO  
THE PLACEBO GROUP

*\*for women who have  
had recurrent miscarriages*



## [SAMANTHA'S STORY]

**Samantha Allen suffered a miscarriage in December 2015. She was recruited to the PRISM trial in June 2017 when she was nine weeks pregnant and she was in the group of participants that were given progesterone. The couple's son, Noah, was born in February 2018 weighing 9lbs 6oz.**

'It was on my birthday in November 2015 when I found out that I was pregnant; it was the best birthday gift I could have hoped for.

'However, my joy soon started to turn to concern when I began having some bleeding when I was around seven weeks pregnant and I ended up in A&E. I had a scan and was told to come back on Christmas Eve for another scan.

'But then on December 23, I started bleeding quite heavily and had to call an ambulance. I was taken to A&E where I was told the baby had died when I was eight weeks pregnant and I was miscarrying. The following day, on Christmas Eve, I had to also go through the trauma of miscarriage surgery.

'Words can't describe our devastation.

I think people can often be dismissive of miscarriage when it happens in early pregnancy, you are treated as a statistic and told it's common. But I am not a statistic, we lost our child and it is a loss we will always grieve.

'Around 15 months after I miscarried I found out I was pregnant again and I was delighted. However, when I was around seven weeks pregnant I started having spotting and, given my previous loss, I decided to go to the early pregnancy unit.

'I had a scan and they said they thought they could detect a heartbeat but weren't certain, so booked me in for another scan two weeks later.

'The spotting continued during those two weeks, so I was relieved when the second scan showed I was pregnant.

'That's when they told me about the PRISM trial and I decided to take part.

'I was prescribed progesterone pessaries which I self-administered until I was 16 weeks pregnant.

'The bleeding stopped within a week of starting the trial, and apart from having some issues with a condition called

symphysis pubis dysfunction, which causes pelvic pain in pregnancy, my pregnancy went really well.

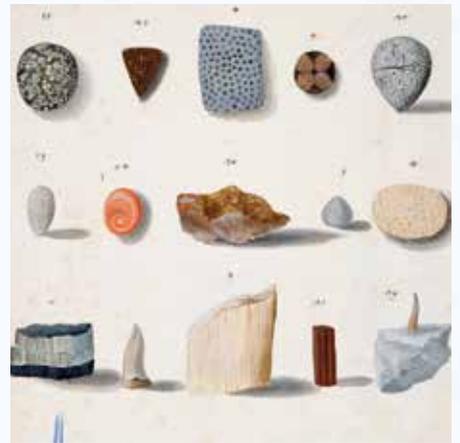
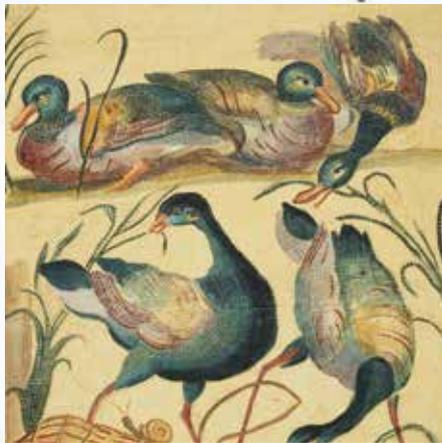
'I opted for a water birth and Noah was born weighing a very healthy 9lbs 6oz in February last year. He's now 14 months old and he's such a lively and incredibly bright little boy who brings us so much joy, I can't imagine life without him.

'Of course, we'll never know whether or not I would have miscarried if I had not taken part in the trial, or if I had been part of the group that received the placebo, either way, I feel fortunate and happy that I did participate. I hope the results of the trial will make a difference to the way women receive treatment moving forwards, and that I had a small part to play in that.'

**The PRISM trial is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and co-ordinated by Birmingham Clinical Trials Unit in collaboration with Tommy's National Centre for Miscarriage Research.**

# DOCUMENTING THE WORLD

Exhibition spotlights '17th-century Instagram'



## AN EPIC ATTEMPT TO RECORD THE WORLD IN VISUAL FORM IS THE FOCUS OF THIS SUMMER'S FASCINATING MAJOR EXHIBITION AT THE BARBER INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS.

During the 17th century, Cassiano dal Pozzo and his brother, Carlo Antonio, assembled a 'Paper Museum' comprising more than 10,000 watercolours, drawings and prints. These depicted subjects as diverse as antiquities, architecture, botany, zoology and geology, social customs and ceremonies, costumes, portraits, topography and military maps. Some 250 years before the invention of photography, their collection was one of the most significant attempts to document the world around them pictorially – in some ways, a visual encyclopaedia or even a proto-Instagram.

Born in Turin in 1588, Cassiano studied at the University of Pisa. He moved to Rome in 1612, where he became a senior administrator in the household of Cardinal Francesco Barberini, nephew of the powerful Pope Urban VIII. From this influential position, Cassiano was ideally placed to fulfil his thirst for knowledge and his passion for culture. He was a key patron of artists such as Poussin, Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi and Bernini, and a close friend of the astronomer Galileo. He began to assemble the Paper Museum in 1615.

Most of the dal Pozzo collection was acquired by George III in 1762 and is still part of the Royal Collection. Now a selection of these illustrations forms the basis of the second annual exhibition collaboration between the Barber and Royal Collections Trust – with the show curated by a team of students on the MA Art History and Curating course. It is the first time the works have been on display together for more than 20 years – while some of the drawings have never been displayed in public before.

Mentored by the Barber's Deputy Director and Head of Collections, Robert Wenley, and course tutor Dr Jutta Vinzent, the students have staged a show that tells

the story of Cassiano's Paper Museum and explores and contextualises the collection's great variety in more than 40 objects.

Central to the display is a selection of drawings from the Paper Museum as well as one complete album – a cabinet of curiosities that includes everything from studies of a head of a pelican and various porcupine body parts to illustrations of antique armour – and even an imagined Roman banquet. The selection shows a fascination with the quirky and unusual and includes a spookily hand-like lemon and a diseased apple whose disfigurements resemble a face. The historical and ancient world is explored through, among other subjects, two colourful drawings of mosaics – one of dabbling ducks, and another of a mythical Nile scene from a Roman villa. Other highlights include drawings of an African civet and an architectural drawing from Michelangelo's studio of a proposed scheme for St Peter's Basilica in Rome.

The drawings are augmented by a selection of rare historical books from the University's Cadbury Research Library, which provide some context to the Paper Museum project. These include a volume from the 1511 *Historiae Animalium* by Conrad Gessner and the intriguingly titled *Monstrorum Historia* of 1642 by Ulisse Aldrovandi – considered the founder of modern natural history.

And, for the first time, the students have worked with the Lapworth Museum to recreate as closely as possible with actual physical objects, the drawn 'tray' of *Specimens of Corals, figured Stones, Minerals and Fossils* – although acknowledging that the fragment of supposed giant's bone in the picture was more likely to have been a piece of mammoth's tusk.

Robert Wenley said that Cassiano lived at a time when people were moving away from a medieval world-view to a more 'scientific' and analytical approach to nature and history; an era where giants and monsters were as real to many as the discoveries of geology, zoology or archaeology.

*'It is very exciting to stage the first exhibition in over 20 years to focus exclusively on Cassiano's remarkable contribution to art and science,'* said Robert. *'The Paper Museum considers his wide-ranging academic and personal interests in the subjects of natural and antiquarian history. It also investigates his fascination with creating visual "documents", which will resonate with today's media-savvy and connected generation, that enjoys documenting almost every facet of everyday life and the world we still feel the urge to go out and explore.'*

***The Paper Museum: The Curious Eye of Cassiano dal Pozzo*** is at the Barber Institute from 14 June until 1 September, and is accompanied by a full programme of talks, workshops and other events for all ages. These include free public lectures from staff involved in the Paper Museum cataloguing process – including David Hemsoll, of the University's Department of Art History, Curating and Visual Studies. There is an opportunity to hear from the students themselves at a special In Conversation evening event on 16 July. For more information and to book tickets, see the Barber website – [www.barber.org.uk](http://www.barber.org.uk).

ARTS



&amp;

JUNE  
2019 –

SCIENCE

FESTIVAL

MAY  
2020

The University of Birmingham's Arts & Science Festival is a celebration of research, culture and collaboration across campus and beyond. In place of its usual week-long slot, the festival returns for its seventh edition with a 12-month programme, designed to showcase the University's striking new parkland, the Green Heart.



Running June 2019–May 2020, our expanded programme invites contributors to respond to four seasonal themes: **Celebration** (summer); **Change** (autumn); **Illumination** (winter), and **Hope** (spring). A host of thinkers, doers and makers will engage with these themes, collectively delivering a programme of exhibitions, talks, screenings, workshops and events taking place both on campus and in the city.

Images © Greg Milner Photography



For more information about the Arts & Science Festival programme and to book, visit [artsandsciencefestival.co.uk](http://artsandsciencefestival.co.uk)

# SCULPTURE

# COMMISSION



Arts & Science Festival is delighted to announce a brand new sculpture commission for 2019–20. Art is a vital part of campus life and this exciting commission will continue the University of Birmingham's long history of working with leading artists. The new public sculpture will bring together arts and science in the University's recently expanded campus parkland, the Green Heart.

Following an open call to artists, four finalists have been selected to produce scale models of their ideas, which will be exhibited in an outdoor display case in the Green Heart. The finalists will deliver events as part of the Arts & Science programme and provide interviews and preparatory works (eg, sketches, smaller models) to be exhibited in the Rotunda Gallery, Aston Webb.

To celebrate the commission, a programme of sculpture-related public events will take place across campus as

part of the festival including artist talks, sculpture tours and creative workshops.

Staff, students, local communities and festival attendees will have an opportunity to vote for which sculpture they would like to see realised in the final season of the festival programme. The winning proposal will be selected by public vote and a panel of creative experts from the arts sector.

*The project is generously supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. Images © Greg Milner Photography*



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
 ENGLAND**



Find out more about how to place your vote for the winning design on the festival website [artsandsciencefestival.co.uk](https://artsandsciencefestival.co.uk)

# NEW CORE SYSTEMS HAVE ARRIVED!

New Core systems brings enhanced Finance, HR, Payroll and Research functionality for all staff, launched on 3 June! We caught up with the programme team to give you an update on the top tips you need to use the system.

Working closely with colleagues across the University, New Core is providing all Academic and Professional Services staff with new online, cloud-based systems for more robust management, tracking and reporting of personal, project and team tasks; from recruitment to reporting on Research Grant spend.

**New Core systems provide new processes and access across a range of areas including:**

**Staff recruitment:** Hiring Managers can now review, monitor and lead on hiring of new staff, from advert to arrival, through a single system.

**Finance:** Requisitions, raising employee expenses and financial reporting is all managed via the new system.

**Personal profile:** all University employees can view and edit their personal information; including address, emergency contacts and bank details through their personal Core HR profile.

**Pay information:** payslips and P60s can also be easily accessed, viewed and downloaded, via your personal profile. Please note, this will mean no more paper payslips for University staff from May 2019.

**Line Management:** Line Managers have access to a range of new reporting functions for their teams, can view dashboards for their direct reports, and can use core systems to approve and monitor employee expenses and leave requests.

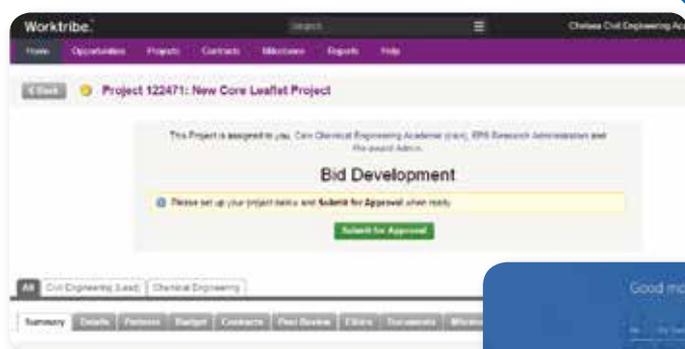
**Research Grant Management:** the University's new Worktribe system enables full grant management from idea to application and set-up, including contracts.

*'The launch of our New Core systems represents the culmination of collaboration and dedication from colleagues across the University. This is an important investment to bring our Finance and HR systems up to date and I am grateful to everyone who has contributed to this complex project. Now that the new systems are in place, it will require involvement from all of us to make them work for the benefit of the University; I look forward to seeing the opportunities and improvements that they will bring.'*

Professor Sir David Eastwood, Vice-Chancellor and Principal

*'New Core systems will deliver real benefits in our day-to-day operations. Although we may experience some bumps in the road as we travel towards embedding these ways of working across all areas of the University, the system is much more easily navigated than the ones it replaces and once we are used to it, it will save everyone time. It looks and feels modern and is akin to systems we all use outside of work. I'd like to thank all colleagues who have been involved in New Core implementation and look forward to seeing the many benefits that it will bring!'*

Erica Conway, Finance Director and New Core Programme Sponsor



New Core systems are bringing new functionality and ways of working for all colleagues. The extent of the impact New Core has on you will depend on the level of involvement you currently have in HR, Payroll, Finance and Research activities. However, these key messages summarise the changes and benefits for all staff:

- **Self-Service:** all University employees can now access, edit and approve more information than ever before for themselves and their teams – from raising expenses, to changing their address.
- **Defined workflows:** new intuitive processes make it easier to see the status of your Finance and HR tasks and to report on and streamline activity.
- **Role-based:** system access is allocated on a role basis, ensuring that you have functionality and reporting tailored to the tasks and information that you need.
- **From prevention to detection:** self-service elements of the system empower colleagues to be able to complete and auto-approve more activity than ever. Robust reporting and oversight is also provided to allow detailed, accurate and real-time auditing and monitoring of actions as needed.

## FIND OUT MORE!

- **Get involved in training** – a wide range of training materials are available for all staff, including classroom training, open surgeries where you can come armed with New Core queries, and themed drop-in sessions. Further details on New Core training are available at [www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/newcoretraining](http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/newcoretraining)
- **Visit Canvas** – a comprehensive array of eLearning is also available for all colleagues on the New Core Canvas site to support them in preparing for, and using new Core systems. The site includes detailed video walkthroughs and guides on all areas of functionality and features interactive simulations and tests. <https://canvas.bham.ac.uk/courses/30112>
- **Ask your local expert** – New Core has a Super User Network with members from all departments across the University. Not sure who your local New Core expert is? Check the New Core intranet for details!
- **Check out programme communications** – New Core newsletter, blog, videos and events are regularly communicated across the University. Visit the intranet for the latest on all of these.

Thank you to all colleagues who have been involved in New Core so far; to find out more about the new system, events and how you can get involved, visit [www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/newcore](http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/newcore) or email [newcore@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:newcore@contacts.bham.ac.uk).

# transforming Our campus

## Green Heart Festival 12-month programme

The celebratory Green Heart Festival launch weekend in early June was just the start of the Festival, with 12 months of activities due to follow, following the seasons:

- Summer – Celebration
- Autumn – Change
- Winter – Illumination
- Spring – Hope

Events are being delivered by staff and students from across the University, with the summer season featuring outdoor Shakespeare for children, a live art performance and an exhibition about health and creativity, among others.



Find out more about the event and how you can get involved at [www.birmingham.ac.uk/greenheartfestival](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/greenheartfestival)

## Centre for Human Brain Health is open

The Centre for Human Brain Health opened earlier this year. It houses an interdisciplinary brain research group with the mission of understanding what makes a brain healthy, how to maintain it and how to prevent and reverse damage.

The new building houses state-of-the-art brain imaging facilities, including a 3T MRI scanner and MEG scanner. Researchers from Psychology, SportExR, Computer Science and MDS all contribute to the work, as well as NHS partners.

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



The new facilities include MRI scanning technology

## Furnishing the Teaching and Learning Building with student views

Students have helped to select the furniture for the Teaching and Learning Building in recent weeks, thanks to a display in the Main Library.

Working with architects BDP and construction partners Willmott Dixon, a selection of furniture was placed into the foyer of the library, where students were able to try it out for themselves. Staff were on hand to hear their views, and surveys helped students communicate what worked and what didn't. Representatives from the University of Birmingham Disability and Mental Health Association (DAMSA) spent time looking at the equipment too, sharing valuable information on how the building can best cater for those with differing accessibility needs.

Opening in January 2020, the Teaching and Learning Building will provide two new lecture theatres, ten seminar rooms and hundreds of study spaces. Progress on site is good. Take a look yourself online, with a virtual tour: [tinyurl.com/tlbtour](https://tinyurl.com/tlbtour)



Furniture testing from above: students sampled a range of furniture for the Teaching and Learning Building

## Tiverton Road Gym

Work is progressing well on the new Tiverton Road Gym in Selly Oak. Formerly a Birmingham City Council swimming pool and gym, the University of Birmingham bought the building when it went up for sale.

In the two years since the University's Sport & Fitness Club opened, demand for fitness gym memberships has significantly increased. The aim of the purchase of the new facility in Selly Oak is to provide additional fitness gym capacity, primarily aimed at students.

**Opening in autumn 2019, the building is being completely refurbished.**

## Nobel Laureate praises 'awesome' new laboratory facility

The Collaborative Teaching Laboratory (CTL) was opened at a special event in May by 2016 Nobel Laureate Professor Sir Fraser Stoddart.

Bringing together practical teaching activities across a broad range of science and engineering disciplines, the CTL incorporates a wet lab, dry lab and e-lab. It allows students to experience the environments they are likely to encounter in industry. Professor Sir Fraser Stoddart was Head of the School of Chemistry at the University of Birmingham between 1993 and 1997. In 2016, he was awarded a Nobel Prize in Chemistry for groundbreaking work he carried out with a group of academic colleagues.

Professor Stoddart said: *'The CTL is an undergraduate training centre with the support of postgraduates and skilled academic staff which is second to none in comparison to all the sites I have visited. The CTL offers opportunities for all kinds of research – especially curiosity-led research. My mind has been blown by the tour of this awesome facility.'*



Professor Stoddart (right) formally opened the CTL

# Paperless Progress

To meet the goals of Birmingham 2026, we are focussed on maximising the effectiveness of our Professional Services. With growing student numbers, new modes of delivery and an increasingly challenging external environment, it is more important than ever that we are equipped to meet the evolving needs and expectations of our stakeholders.

One team making progress in this area is the Admissions team in External Relations, who undertook a project to enhance their systems and transform the applicant journey.

There are two ways in which students apply to study at the University. Undergraduate students apply via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) while applicants for postgraduate, foundation, Dubai campus and most other study routes apply directly to the University. The paperless admissions project covered both application streams. The ultimate goal is a common and consistent process for all entry routes, thus improving the overall efficiency and effectiveness of processing student applications.

For those unfamiliar with University systems, the Banner Interface Record Management System (BIRMS) is the University's in-house student record management system. This houses student information and provides functionality such as registering students for their modules, monitoring student attendance and engagement, and processing marks, progress decisions and award decisions for end of session. Although not traditionally used as part of the admissions process, this project developed the existing resource in BIRMS to electronically process undergraduate applications from UCAS, generate and send offer letters to applicants, and manage the Confirmation and Clearing process, including auto-matching of an applicant's offer to their results.

As ever, cross-department collaboration was key to successful delivery. Working with colleagues in IT services, the two

teams developed an ambitious plan based on an extensive list of requirements, but thanks to the agile approach to working adopted by IT services, the development process was swift and within a few months testing was underway. Extending our use of BIRMS maximised an existing skillset within IT Services. The new functionality launched in September 2018, in time for the first UCAS applications of the 2019 recruitment cycle. Feedback from stakeholders has been overwhelmingly positive.

*'The new UG paperless system is a welcome improvement to the applications management process. Admissions tutors report that they find it intuitive to use, with little or no training required. It is a fantastic example of how user-friendly and fit-for-purpose systems can be designed in-house, using an existing resource, if the right people are selected for the job and given plenty of time and support to deliver.'*

For the Non-UCAS stream, the focus has been on developing an existing electronic system; the newly titled, 'Direct Application Admissions System' or DAAS. Previously only used for PG taught and research applications, this system now includes applications for pre-sessional English, foundation pathways, Dubai, undergraduate direct entry and summer schools. The first phase improved the functionality of the application form, applicant portal and agent portal, with all developments launched in November 2018.

Of course, there are many other benefits to a paperless process: a reduction in postage, printing and paper costs and in the associated environmental cost of a paper-heavy process, reduced manual processing leading to faster response times, and improved communication with applicants. In fact, the BIRMS process for producing an offer letter has reduced from eight steps in total to just one. Over the last two years application numbers have grown by 9%, which is approximately 8,000 applications. It is important we stay within agreed service standards without adding additional resources to the admission team, although temporary staff continue to be used at peak times.

Phase two is already underway. The UCAS stream will provide solutions for interviewing subject and A2B applicants. For the Non-UCAS stream, further enhancements to the system will include communications sent to tutors when an application has been forwarded for consideration and when a PGR applicant has been made an offer, the ability for research hubs to send an application to be considered by more than one supervisor, and additional processing developments for Colleges and Admissions.

## Learn more

To find out more about the Admissions team and these projects, please contact Natalie Taylor, [N.L.Taylor.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:N.L.Taylor.1@bham.ac.uk) or Jo Labudek, [J.S.Labudek@bham.ac.uk](mailto:J.S.Labudek@bham.ac.uk)

# CAMPUS CURIOSITIES

## What is it?

***The Wrestlers* by Edward Bainbridge-Copnall (1903–73), 1950, Research and Cultural Collections**

## Where is it?

**Opposite the Engineering Building (Y3 on campus map)**

An energetic, biomorphic sculpture, *The Wrestlers* nestles among the plants outside of the Engineering building. Upon initial viewing, it appears to be a solid mass of granite, but closer inspection reveals the two intertwined eponymous figures.

It was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1950 before being purchased by the University in dedication to Professor F K Bannister, Professor of Thermodynamics (1909–75). Bannister established the Postgraduate School of Thermodynamics; it was the University's first postgraduate school as well as one of the first in the country. An aptly chosen sculpture,

wrestling lends itself to thermodynamics, a science which explores relationships between heat and other mechanical and electrical forms of energy. A paradox is illustrated in the sculpture by the use of so obstinate a medium as granite, being carved to create the fluid movement of grappling figures depicted as abstract and simplified forms.

Edward Bainbridge-Copnall was an artist well known for his architectural and figurative sculptures. He trained at Goldsmiths College and the Royal Academy, and went on to become President of the Royal Society of Sculptors from 1961 to 1966.



## Find out more

A new sculpture is coming to the University! Read about the Arts and Science Festival Sculpture Commission on page 9.

You can discover more of the sculptures held by Research and

Cultural Collections during the upcoming Arts & Science Festival. For further information, please see [www.artsandsciencefestival.co.uk](http://www.artsandsciencefestival.co.uk).

## Chancellor's column

In May, I was privileged to speak at the opening of the Barber Institute's latest exhibition – *A Tale of Two Empires: Rome and Persia*.

The exhibition tells the story of the relationship between the Roman and Persian Empires between the 3rd century and 7th century using the Barber Institute's collection of Sasanian coins – the second largest such collection in the UK. There were also Seals lent to us by the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

Also present at the event was Malcolm Deboo, the President of the Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe, of which I am proud to be Patron. The Sasanians were of course Zoroastrians and the Zoroastrian Parsis have a presence in the West Midlands through the Tata family, owners of Jaguar Land Rover!

Professor Michael Whitby made, in effect, his 'farewell' speech in which he spoke of his research 40 years ago on the Roman emperor, Maurice, who featured

prominently in this exhibition; Michael had literally come full circle!

Also present at the opening was Lord Bishop David Urquhart, the Bishop of Birmingham, who is also my colleague at the House of Lords as convener of the Bishops. This made the event an inter faith gathering as well!

The whole event made me so proud of Nicola Kalinsky and the curators of the exhibition Maria Vrij, Michael Burling and Jen Ridding, who put together this exhibition in such an innovative, creative and unique way showcasing the depth and breadth of research that exists in our University. The Barber Institute has also now an ongoing relationship with the Royal Collection where our students curate the annual exhibitions at The Barber, selecting the items from the archives at Windsor.

The Barber Institute has always been a jewel in the crown of the University of Birmingham and exhibitions such as *A Tale of Two Empires: Rome and Persia*,



not only showcase our treasures and our research expertise, but reach out and engage with other institutions and the community, enriching the lives of so many people not just in our University, but also in Birmingham, in the region, around the country and globally.

*Lord Bilimoria is the founder and chairman of Cobra Beer, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham and the founding Chairman of the UK India Business Council.*

Professor Robin Mason, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) and Professor Dagmar Scheel-Toellner, Professor of Inflammation Research, were interviewed for Buzz's *Friday Afternoon at the Bratby* podcast, discussing Brexit and the impact on the University. Here is what they had to say:



*NB this interview took place prior to the government and EU agreeing a six-month extension to the Brexit deadline.*

#### What would be the best deal for the University?

**RM:** The best deal, if we leave the EU, will maintain mobility of staff and students and where the exchange of knowledge and ideas is as unimpeded as possible – so, in any Brexit, we'd want continued association with Horizon Europe and Erasmus+.

**DST:** It's important that we retain funding from the EU, but I agree with Robin that the connections with people are more important. In my area, Rheumatology, we've been participating in six EU-funded networks and have received 17 years of continuous funding. This has allowed us to build a network across Europe, and to lose those interactions would be tragic.

#### Have we already felt an impact on the University?

**RM:** We've been fortunate that effects have been limited. There are a small number of cases where people participating in research grants within a European network have been asked not to lead, and in a very small number of instances not to participate. We've also seen a reduction in undergraduate student recruitment from the EU by about 30% over the past few years, but when I speak to recently recruited EU staff, Birmingham is still seen as an attractive place to come and work.

#### What has the University done to prepare for Brexit?

**RM:** We have developed contingency measures for all areas and gone into a huge amount of detail to prepare for a no-deal Brexit and the continued currency depreciation: looking at catering and supplies, options for students who want to study abroad and visa situations for colleagues. We've been supporting staff in a number of ways, such as the interest-free loan scheme, but if people have got any good ideas, please get in touch.

#### What would be the single-biggest risk?

**RM:** There would be short-term disruption, most significantly if sterling depreciates and everything becomes more expensive, but the biggest effect will be in the medium-term, if the appeal of the UK is lost to European countries like Germany and the Netherlands.

**DST:** The UK used to be viewed as 'cool Britain' but now I think the outside perspective has changed. I don't think that scientists who are already here will necessarily leave, but it's going to become increasingly difficult to recruit the next generation. I've noticed that we've received far fewer EU applicants to one of our high-profile PhD programmes in my department, but hopefully, this will just be a transient stage.

**RM:** The silver lining to the uncertainty, however, is that all of the government contacts that I've spoken to are very positive about our continued association with EU Framework funding and Erasmus+, even in a no-deal scenario.

#### We're anticipating a loss of revenue. Could you shed some light on this and how we'd go about making up any potential shortfall?

**RM:** We get around £40 million per year from EU sources. It's not insignificant, but our annual revenue is around £700 million. We'd certainly notice this loss, but we'll survive and there are other sources of research income that are coming on stream. The UK government has committed to increasing R&D spend from 1.7% to 2.4% of GDP, and the Industrial Strategy is bringing a lot of new funding. We expect to get our fair share, and this is why I believe that the financial consequences of Brexit are secondary to impact on people.

#### How do you think student mobility will be affected?

**DST:** If we maintain our place within EU programmes it may not be affected too much. It's really important that we have access to ERC grants and retain access to the Marie Skłodowska-Curie action plan, which directly creates mobility for early-career scientists.

**RM:** There is a government review underway at the moment, asking what or if the UK should replace the ERC competition with a national competition. Our response is that this would be better than nothing, but it would be far better for us to be included in ERC. On Erasmus+, the University has committed to underwriting, for the next academic year, grants for students for whom study in Europe is an essential part of their degree and for widening participation students.

#### With or without a deal, would there be any positives from Brexit?

**RM:** It has forced us to focus far more deliberately about Europe. Now that the ease of European collaboration has been challenged, it has made us think more about how we can strategically collaborate with Europe. I'd like to think we'd have done these anyway, but partnerships with Trinity College Dublin and the University of Amsterdam have been catalysed by Brexit.

#### Dagmar, what's it like being an EU member of staff at the moment?

**DST:** Brexit came as a complete shock to me. I really like Birmingham and its multiculturalism, so I was disappointed when the city voted to leave. The University has done a lot of positive work to support us and to encourage us to stay.

To listen to the podcast episode, please visit:  
<https://fatby.podbean.com/e/episode-5-brexit/>