A decade at SIM: celebrating ten years of our Singapore partnership

Eve Pollard on happiness

Little Learners
A curious year at
The Maples Day Nursery
It is, now, common and important for employers to have a ‘wellbeing strategy’. The pressures of the modern world, the pace of change, and the demands that are made on so many of us by internal and external expectations mean that the world and the workplace are often increasingly challenging environments. A well-conceived wellbeing strategy is a way of recognising and mitigating some of these pressures.

Propriety understood, a wellbeing strategy has many facets. At its core, it is about ensuring that all of that we do at work at the University are appropriately equipped for, and supported in, our roles. This means that expectations are reasonable, roles and responsibilities are clear, and development is supported.

If universities are to aspire to retain the best, they must be places where colleagues can make and develop their careers. Career progression is, for many, a crucially important part of job satisfaction, and there is an expectation that we as a good employer should nurture and support. If you look across the data on promotion and advancement, one of the most encouraging features of the last few years has been the increasing diversity of colleagues in promoted positions in the University. This hasn’t arisen by chance but is a consequence of the University’s investment in being an employer that recognises, celebrates, and promotes diversity. We have much to do here, and are committed to doing so, notably through our work on the University’s Equality Scheme.

We have invested increasingly in staff development and support over the last decade. Many parts of the University have developed active wellbeing programmes. At a University level, we have now launched our staff volunteering allocation, which entitles all colleagues to take a day off to volunteer for a local organisation or charity. And we have recently invested in LinkedIn Learning, which gives access to a huge range of personal and professional development resources for all staff and students.

If many colleagues indicate very high levels of job satisfaction at Birmingham, there are also indications that the level of stress experienced by colleagues is increasing. We are not complacent about this, and it is something that the University Executive Board frequently considers. PDVs, properly conducted, are an important part of ensuring that we are as appropriately supported to develop in our roles, to ensure workloads are manageable, and to identify the support and resources necessary for people to contribute effectively to the University. Over and above this support from managers, we are committed to ensuring that specialist support is available to colleagues when they need it, another area of investment in recent years.

Our overall aim here must be to create an environment that enables colleagues to give their best and to relish what they do. We have done much already, and will continue to do more in this area. We have already agreed to bring together and coordinate the various wellbeing initiatives in the institution into a single strategy. ‘People and culture’ is one of the themes on which we are particularly engaging with the University community as part of the development of our new Strategic Framework over the coming months.

Alongside these more formal supporting mechanisms, the ways in which we behave and the ways in which we encourage one another are, I think, equally important to wellbeing. We live in a culture that finds criticism easy. From our politics downwards, it is often much easier to put someone down than to build up. Although many colleagues indicate very high levels of job satisfaction at Birmingham, there are also indications that the level of stress is increasing. We are, I think, equally important to wellbeing. We live in a culture that finds criticism easy. From our politics downwards, it is often much easier to put someone down than to build up. From our politics downwards, it is often much easier to put someone down than to build up.

If we are to continue to thrive as a university, if we are to be a truly inclusive community, and if we are to be able to offer our best, the University must be a place of sanctuary where we model different and better values than the wider society we inhabit. That is not to say that we should be uncritical, but we should be critical with a commitment to collegiality. This doesn’t mean that we should pretend disagreements don’t exist, but it does mean that we should be careful about the language that we use when we are engaging in those disagreements and understand that we are disagreeing with people who work in the same institution and have an equal commitment to its values and success.

Above all, we should remember the power of what we say. We all need and value encouragement. A word of praise, a sense of purpose, or noticing and taking the time to thank someone who has helped, can sometimes be the most important things we hear. That is why something about encouragement is that it both enhances our sense of wellbeing but also encourages us to do still more and still better. Words matter.

October’s forum offered the opportunity for reflection on the many achievements of the past year.

Research: Another record year of research income: £215.5 million in awards in 2018/19 + £11.1 million above target.

Campus developments: Our £1 billion, ten-year campus investment programme is a significant investment in our student experience.

Student experience: Our NSS results achieved our highest ever response rate of 72%.

Digital infrastructure: June 2019 saw New Core implemented, which has redesigned the Finance, HR Payroll, and Research Grant Management processes.

Regional impact: the development of the Birmingham Life Sciences park, Twayley Energy Park and the Exchange, plus many others.

Transforming lives: Birmingham in Action will aim to raise £400 million and secure 1 million volunteering hours.

Global reach: in Europe, India, China and Brazil.

League tables: Domestically we are now top five for the student group. Internationally, and in Shanghai we’ve seen a big improvement compared to other UK institutions.

Recruitment: a strong recruitment round included our largest ever intake of 2,000 students.

Staff base: we’ve seen an 18% growth in academic and professional services staff in the last three years.

Going forward:

On research: a focus on REF and our impact, and continued focus on grants and interdisciplinary working.

On education: introducing the new academic leaver year (NAY), widening access and participation, and improving NSS.

On recruitment: a focus on the International student experience and our global academic reputation.

On Dubai: developing the next phase of our University of Birmingham in Dubai.

On Brexit: continuing to support staff and developing European partnerships.

On Research: enhancing the smooth function of Core systems, our SIARs system and enhanced distance learning.


BIRMINGHAM PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP SERIES

CHANGING THINKING FOR CHALLENGING TIMES

Birmingham Professionals are crucial to the University’s success as we enter an increasingly complex times. As the higher education landscape becomes more volatile, Birmingham Professionals will have to continue to be agile and innovative to stay ahead as a leading institution. The Birmingham Professional Leadership Series has been designed to help you to better understand how the University operates, what’s changing and how you can navigate and adapt for your own success. Run by colleagues across the University, the series gives you the opportunity to ask questions, meet new people and understand collective challenges.

There have been several popular events already in the series, with more scheduled over the coming year around four key themes:

- Me in 3 – my path to career success: the highs, the lows and everything in between
- Mentoring: what’s in it for me?
- Demystifying the University: everything you wanted to know but didn’t know how to ask
- The secret of happiness: tips for managing and leading in a complex environment

Sessions are open to all Professional Services staff, if you’ve been keen to develop your career at the University and want to know more about how the University operates then these events are for you.

Student experience: Our NSS results achieved our highest ever response rate of 72%.

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WHY SINGAPORE?

‘Singapore was where we felt immediately welcome; the support we had from the Singapore government was crucial. We were made to feel immediately at home discussing business education provision with SIM.’

Barbara Armstrong, Programme Director, 2009–15.

In 2009, the timing for the partnership was ripe. Singapore was focused on developing a hub for global education, and we shared similar values and the same vision: growing global education to provide quality, capable graduates for the South East Asian jobs market.

Whilst initial recruitment planned to include a substantial percentage of international students, it was young Singaporean students, fresh from ‘Poly’, who crowded into early Open Houses, keen to convert their diplomas into a BSc (Honours) with two years of study. By 2012, University of Birmingham undergraduate numbers at SIM reached 200.

Barbara added: ‘SIM is a bit like a Chamber of Commerce – it drives and supports business, except SIM is driving business schools and business education for South East Asia. Together we have been able to identify opportunities.’

A GLOBAL EXPERIENCE

Students who enrol at SIM for our BSc International Business embark on a programme of study and cultural exchange, arising from the warm campus of Birmingham’s cooler redbrick setting. They later study at one of our partner universities in Canada, Japan, China, or at a European university. Our current strategy for Student Mobility will see more opportunities for study abroad in the near future.

EVLING WITH SINGAPORE’S BUSINESS LANDSCAPE

The launch of Business Management with Communications in 2012 was strategically timed to meet growing demands of Singapore’s new digital economy, resonating with the government’s drive to become a ‘Smart Nation.’ Further opportunities for students were provided in response to Singapore’s growing business needs, including Business Management with Industrial Placement and the availability of ‘Year in Industry’ pathways. Studying in Singapore, students are able to graduate from a top UK university having gained real hands-on experience of working across a range of businesses, from start-ups to global companies.

Programme Director for the BSc Business Management suite of Programmes, Hazel Westwood, said: ‘Our students at SIM are graduating from a triple-accredited global business school and have a set of contemporary skills, making them industry ready.

‘Additions to the curriculum – Business Analytics, Digital Marketing and Strategic Stakeholder Communications – develop the skills and knowledge to meet the changing needs of business.

Hazel added: ‘We are in the privileged position of educating a fantastic group of Singaporeans and international students by having faculty, often world experts in their fields, to deliver TEF Gold standard research-led teaching.’

RENOVED REPUTATION

From small yet ambitious beginnings a decade ago, the programme today need no introduction to major graduate employers. As a fresh alumni, early days got us ‘just got my first grad job. In the interview, I started to explain about the University of Birmingham, but HR just smiled and said “we know all about the University of Birmingham at SIM Global, that’s why you were invited for interview.”’

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES SUPPORT

The programme is administered by staff from the Edgbaston campus, led by Andy Buck, who has worked on the Singapore programme for ten years in a variety of roles. He is currently the Learning and Teaching Officer for the Transnational Education Programmes and leads a team of four staff – Karen Hayre (Senior Administrator), Katrina Jan, Clare Harris and Leanne Scott (Administrators). They provide expert support to the Academic Programme Leads including Denia Cordon (Director of Internationalisation), Brian McGarrigle, Hazel Westwood and Cristina Sambrook (BSc Business Management Programme Directors), Steve Keepas (BSc Accounting and Finance Programme Director), Nic Potter and Marco Banassi (MSc Programme Directors).

We are not in this race alone. We are working alongside businesses and Government to address the impact of climate change and ambitious decarbonisation targets.

At a Conference of British Industry (CBI) event on November 11, some of the biggest names in British industry came together to discuss and question how embarking on a ‘decade of delivery’ could ensure the UK meets the target for a net-zero economy by 2050.

The University was delighted to be the sole academic sponsor for this important event, working alongside our partners at the Energy Research Accelerator (ERA), the Business Engagement (BE) team, ensured a high-profile presence for the University, highlighting just some of our world-changing research in the areas of climate change and sustainability.

Professor Martin Freer, Director of the Birmingham Energy Institute, and ERA, spoke as part of a panel discussion on ‘The pathway to net-zero – achieving our 2030 decarbonisation plans: alongside industry experts from the CBI, EDF Energy and the Committee on Climate Change. Many questions from the room were concerned with how renewable heat in homes (a key component of achieving net-zero) will affect consumers. ‘You can have all the policy you like, but without consumers buying in with enthusiasm, it won’t happen’ advised Professor Freer. The city of Birmingham could already be considered one of the greenest cities in the UK, and as leaders in the region, the University has an important role to play in raising the profile of this work to enthuse people about the opportunities for new ways to heat their homes.

Overall, the panel were in agreement; we need organisations to work together on this issue, without competition, to deliver the change that is needed.

Our research-led perspective has a lot to offer businesses who want adopt strategies and learn how to put sustainability first. With the many distractions of the current political agenda, it feels timely for this collaborative approach to push for change and a single goal for both industry and academia, that of a net-zero carbon future.

Can we win the race to net-zero?

From pigeons wearing backpacks to monitor air quality to training the legal professionals to tackle Earth’s most pressing issues, alongside the energy systems of tomorrow; our experts are as innovative as ever and leading the charge in the race to tackle the environmental challenges of our time.

Why not visit our website to find out more: www.intranet.bham.ac.uk

Find the brand toolkit at: www.intranet.bham.ac.uk/brand/toolkit
Almost 30,000 postgraduates began their initial teacher education (ITE) in England this September, and over 350 of these are in our School of Education. What do we know about the students who train here? What brings them to our programmes? Where do they take up jobs?

By Frances Child

#TRANSFORMINGLIVES

Supporting our students
Over 25 per cent of our student teachers join us from our undergraduate and postgraduate programmes: our students are more likely than the national average to have a PhD, Masters, first or 2:1 and come from a black and minority ethnic (BAME) background – 20–30 per cent. Students benefit from established partnerships with local and secondary schools across Birmingham and the West Midlands. Local schools are integral; teachers and headteachers join us on selection days, sit on our advisory and steering groups and contribute professional expertise. As well as working with over 60 primary and 100 secondary schools in any term, our teaching is enhanced by strong links with Birmingham City Council, local and national charities, subject associations and alumni of our programmes.

Why Birmingham?
Undergraduate and postgraduate students who are thinking of teaching face a wide range of choices in an increasingly complex landscape. Our ITE programmes offer distinctive research-informed approaches and high expectations of specialist pedagogical subject knowledge and include assignments that build the skills of professional enquiry. Most students in the primary and secondary phases qualify with PGCEs(Ed) (QTS) and return in years two or three of their careers to complete a part-time Masters dissertation for the award of MA Teaching Studies. University of Birmingham teacher educators have strong links with colleagues in departments across the campus. These relationships are important in terms of recruitment but also in ensuring that there are strong subject communities who work together to build a rich future for the discipline.

The school on our doorstep
Our programmes benefit from our own University of Birmingham School in Selly Oak. This term, more than 70 secondary biology, English, history, mathematics and physics students have undertaken mini placements at the School. During September and October, students learned about practical work and taught groups of pupils in school laboratories and classrooms, learning from their University tutors and University of Birmingham School teachers, many of whom are former University ITE students. In the Spring Term, our primary mathematics specialists will spend time in the School to learn more about their subject in the secondary phase.

Addressing the teaching shortage
National data on teacher shortages is concerning – only 47 per cent of physics vacancies will be filled by specialists next September. Specialists are also less likely to work in our most deprived communities. The University of Birmingham can make a significant contribution to widening access by continuing to place specialist teachers in the schools that are most in need.

At a time of challenging recruitment, we have to work very hard to ensure sufficient numbers of graduates consider teacher training with us. We are delighted when academic colleagues recommend teaching to our postgraduates. We know that teaching is a rewarding and valuable profession.

This week’s adventures are a perfect example of how it works. We visit Winterbourne House and Garden (just next door) every day, and we’ve made a Forest School in the wilderness there. Children bringing back sticks led us to Julia Donaldson’s book Stick Man. After chatting about the story, they each created their own unique stick man. Out in the garden they looked at how the wind affected the stick; weighed down the sticks with bags of stones, and tested changes in weight; shared how the stick man might feel, what his family might look like, what their own family looks like…

‘The Curiosity Approach doesn’t mean our approach at The Elms and The Oaks as well.’

With two thriving day nurseries in The Elms and The Oaks, it was a natural step for the University to add a third. For the staff team, it was so much more. ‘It was an opportunity to bring in a whole new approach to childcare: child-led, using natural resources, and resolutely sustainable in its practice.

The Maples Day Nursery opened in December 2018. To mark their first birthday, Nursery Manager Heather Bench looks back on an exciting year of learning and change.

“Our vision for The Maples comes from the ‘Curiosity Approach’: Making curious central to learning sounds simple: children are naturally curious. However, nurseries often make it secondary to a pre-planned timetable of routines and activities that are created for the children, not with them.

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‘The Curiosity Approach doesn’t mean our children aren’t learning key skills and acquiring knowledge. We follow the Early Years framework, and we’re Ofsted registered. But our planning takes place “in the moment”; by creative, mindful, playful practitioners who use every child’s interests and needs to direct their day.

Over 300 of these are in our School of Education. What do we know about the students who train here? What brings them to our programmes? Where do they take up jobs?

The Maples Day Nursery?
Eve is a journalist, presenter and broadcaster. Often referred to as ‘The First Lady of Fleet Street’, Eve was one of the first female editors of a national newspaper in the UK, editing the Sunday Mirror from 1987–91 and the Sunday Express from 1991–94.

On November 4, Eve Pollard delivered the 41st annual Baggs Memorial Lecture on the theme of ‘Happiness – what it is and how it may be achieved by individuals as well as nations.’

On happiness

Happiness is more important than we ever think it is, but the challenges of life can make it quite difficult to be happy, particularly as you get older. I think when you’re young you are naturally happy and less bothered by things, but of course when you get older you suffer setbacks and disappointments.

Oh, happiness... What more could we do to help working parents?

WHAT MORE COULD WE DO TO HELP WORKING PARENTS?

If I were Prime Minister, just for a day, I would say that every possible school should be open from 7.00am–7.00pm. Very few women can get a decent job that allows them to go home and collect their kids, and the cost of childcare is astronomical.

WHO’VE YOU MET WHO HAS MADE YOU HAPPIEST?

I think it’s mostly the teams I’ve worked in and working on campaigns. Very early on in my career I remember working on a campaign against a contraceptive device for women, known as the Dalkon Shield, which damaged women. They’d stopped selling it in America, but it was still on sale in Europe and we had a very successful campaign to get it removed from the shelves – that was a great day and I remember lots of cheering in the office.

In terms of who’s influenced me, it’s the people I’ve met who wrote brilliantly, and great photographers. My sister-in-law, who worked on the Sunday Times, Sally Soames, was a great photographer and taught me all about that magic moment that you have to catch. Astair Campbell was my political editor and often stopped me putting my foot in it with politicians… we’d laugh about it afterwards.

ONE OF THE STRANDS OF THE LECTURE IS HOW HAPPINESS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY NATIONS. WHAT ROLE DO YOU THINK THE NATIONAL MEDIA HAS TO PLAY IN THIS?

I don’t tend to think about happiness in terms of nations, because in my view nations who do not treat their women right cannot make their people happy.

As part of the University’s mission to create a greener and more environmentally friendly campus, students and staff have launched a campaign to drastically reduce the use of single-use plastics.

WEARING YOUR HAPPINESS HAT, IS THERE ANYTHING FROM YOUR HISTORY IN THE INDUSTRY THAT YOU’D DO DIFFERENTLY TODAY TO INCREASE THE OVERALL SUM OF HAPPINESS?

Well, the happiness hat is a sort of schizophrenic outfit. People like gossiping, and we did do a lot of gossipsy front pages. I guess I would have held back on some of that – the breakup of marriages and things like that, which are unfortunate for those involved, but thrilling to 3.5 million readers, so it becomes a very hard thing to judge. As a country we put ourselves down a bit, we are so cynical and like to bring down those who are successful. I think we should all be a bit gentler… but not totally.

Moves have already been made to reduce plastic waste in areas across campus.

Economics student Harriet Noy said: ‘I’m excited to see the changes the University is making to achieve a more sustainable campus. I think the more students we get on board, the easier it will be to achieve our plastic reduction goal.’

Therapy
goals

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Goodbye to bad rubbish

As part of the University’s mission to create a greener and more environmentally friendly campus, students and staff have launched a campaign to drastically reduce the use of single-use plastics.

At a recent event, volunteers were recruited to support the move, which will have an impact on many walks of campus life: catering, accommodation, building developments and more, which together serve more than 30,000 students and 8,000 staff.

Director of Estates Trevor Payne said: ‘We are passionate about our role in caring for the environment and I am very proud of the work we have done to date to reduce single-use plastic on campus. We still have lots of work to do here, which is why we are asking students to give us their ideas on how we can make more progress.’

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Laboratories:

- A need plastic recycling scheme is being rolled out across laboratories.
- The University is trialing an innovative process for laboratory single-use plastic gloves, aimed at diverting these from landfill to either be recycled into park benches and fence panels, or to create energy from incineration.

Sport & Fitness:

- Encouraging members to use reusable pool shoes, like flip flops, rather than using single-use plastic shoe covers.
- Encouraging members to use reusable water bottles, rather than disposable ones.

This is just the beginning, with a major audit of all major building developments on campus taking place, to see where plastic can be reduced in the construction process.

In addition, students in University halls of residence have pitted themselves against other UK universities in a recycling competition run by the NUS and Coca-Cola.

Reduce, Reuse, Rethink.

5,500 FREE CITY WATER BOTTLES MADE FROM SUGAR CANE

SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS
transforming our campus

Campus developments: forthcoming milestones

As 2019 draws to a close, there are two major development projects marking milestones.

Later this month, the School of Engineering will celebrate ‘topping out’, a little over a year since the groundbreaking ceremony. This new building will provide a dedicated home to a host of engineering disciplines, currently in various buildings across campus. Staff and student groups have had opportunities to look around the site and input their views on how the building will operate when completed in the latter part of 2020.

Moving to the other end of campus, the Teaching and Learning Building is now in its final stages of being fitted out and prepared for opening in January 2020. Students and staff will benefit from a 500-seater lecture theatre, a 250-seater interactive lecture theatre, ten seminar rooms and a height adjustable hand basin. The building will provide significantly enhanced teaching and learning facilities.

Meanwhile, you may have seen the Exchange Roadshow in a variety of locations across campus during October and November. Opening in the first half of 2021, this will be the University’s home in the city centre, with facilities available to the public as well as a series of high-profile initiatives involving academic colleagues and students. More information on this project will be shared in 2020.

Accessibility continues to be a key priority for colleagues in Estates. The team now has a dedicated Accessibility Officer, who helps inform the design of new developments, in partnership with students and staff with disabilities. The newest facility on campus, as a direct result of student requests, is a Changing Places room. This is a dedicated space for assisted changing and personal care, which includes a hoist, a wet/dry toilet, a height adjustable hand basin and a height adjustable couch. It is one of just 1,996 publicly available facilities of its kind in the UK and the second on campus. The other is in Sport & Fitness.

In October, I had the privilege of delivering the Provost’s Lecture at the University of Birmingham Dubai. The theme of my lecture was ‘The power of universities to power the world’. The lecture was at our temporary Dubai campus (work has already started on our state-of-the-art campus for 4,500 students which will be ready in 2021) and was attended by Mohammad Abdulrah, Director of Dubai Knowledge Park and Dubai Academic City, as well as our faculty, staff and students. Being in Dubai it was, of course, a completely global audience!

To summarise, universities make a phenomenal impact in three ways:

Firstly, they make our students better people – not only through the education they receive, but through everything they experience being at university, including the lifelong and generation-long friendships they develop.

Secondly, universities also make an impact on their local communities, their region and their country. For example, the University of Birmingham alone contributes £3.5 billion to our economy every year. Birmingham alone contributes £3.5 billion to our economy every year.

Thirdly, universities make an impact globally through international students and staff, and through the global reach of their research. In fact, universities are one of the strongest sources of soft power for Britain with Beling ambassadors being created; there are more world leaders educated at British and American universities than any other countries globally, by far.

In my lecture, I was able to illustrate these three areas using the University of Birmingham as a sterling example. In October, we also hosted the Birmingham Business School Annual Lecture, ‘21st Century Luddities – to what extent do entrepreneurs have a responsibility to think about the impact of their innovations on society?’. Delivered by our alumnus, Nick Jenkins, the founder of Moonpig and one of the country’s most successful high entrepeneurs and investors as well as being a former dragon on Dragons’ Den.

In November, the India Institute Annual Lecture was delivered by Hardeep Singh Puri, a Minister in the Indian Government. His lecture was about Gurus Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, on the occasion of his 550th birth anniversary. The Minister announced that the University of Birmingham has been awarded the Guru Nanak Chair sponsored by the Government of India and match funded by the University of Birmingham. This Chair will be a huge impact locally, including with the Indian and Sikh community in the West Midlands, nationally as well as globally to the 27 million Sikhs around the world, the 30 million-strong Indian diaspora globally and of course in India – another example of Birmingham’s amazing and wide-ranging impact.

Lord Stilling was the founder and chairman of Cobra Beer, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham and the founding Chairman of the UK-India Business Council.
Staff survey
Coming in the new year

Find out more:
www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/haveyoursay