

Section A

A VISION FOR BIRMINGHAM LEARNING

At Birmingham, we are committed to enabling all our students to profit from a **culture of learning, aligned with our research ethos, which is based upon critical enquiry, debate and self-motivation.**

What does this mean for our undergraduate and taught postgraduate students?

Our learning culture takes different forms in different disciplinary areas, each of which have their own distinct characters and traditions of learning. Central to our learning culture across all our disciplines at Birmingham, however, is a model of enquiry-based learning. This approach to learning is intended to challenge and engage our students who will encounter it, in different guises, at different levels of their educational experience.

Enquiry-based learning describes an environment in which learning is driven by a process of enquiry shared by the student. Depending upon the level and the discipline, it can encompass problem-based learning, evidence-based learning, small scale investigations, field work, projects and research.

Enquiry-based learning enables students to take increasing control of their own learning as they progress through their degree programmes. Moreover, it encourages students to acquire essential skills which are highly valued in University graduates in the competitive graduate employment sector: creativity, independence, team-working, goal-setting and problem-solving. Such skills are no less key to our graduates' personal development and enrich their capacity for 'lifelong learning'.

Enquiry-based learning is the product of a real partnership between our academic teachers and researchers and our students. It understands learning as an interactive process between students and those academic staff who support and enable their progress. It places students at the centre of the learning process so that they learn through involvement and ownership and not simply by listening. **It views students initially as active participants in the learning process, and once equipped with the right tools, as active participants in the investigation and analysis of problems, issues and evidence encountered in teaching and learning situations.** It fosters and promotes learner responsibility and learner independence.

The learning culture at Birmingham encourages and expects our students, appropriately supported by our academic staff, to:

- Engage with complex, challenging problems and real world issues
- Proactively use available resources to address problems, construct solutions and answers, identify new questions and create new knowledge
- Question, reason, and think critically about what they see, hear and feel, weighing up evidence and the opinions of others and reaching their own conclusions
- Reflect constructively on their own learning, not least through use of feedback
- Share their knowledge and experience with fellow students and staff
- Manage effectively their own learning processes, individual and collaborative
- Understand and communicate effectively with individuals from differing backgrounds and perspectives
- Be equipped through their learning, skills and personal development for the demands of the careers to which they aspire
- Enjoy their learning, making it rewarding and fun

What does this mean for our postgraduate research students?

At Birmingham, we aim to provide an enquiry-based research environment that enables our postgraduate research students (PGRs) to hone their potential to undertake world-class research. Key to that environment is a model of PGR induction and supervision that allows students to identify their research and training goals, take ownership of their own programme and develop skills geared to the achievement of research excellence and research leadership and to the effective communication of their discoveries. While facilitating their individual enquiry, we also encourage our PGRs to exchange ideas with different research and disciplinary traditions, as well as offering them the opportunity to explore, where possible and appropriate, collaborative and team working in a range of contexts.

We are determined to help our students choose a field of study about which they can be passionate. In partnership with their academic supervisors and other researchers, our PGR students gain the potential to transform the world through what they learn and discover. They will thereby also acquire skills that enable them to move successfully into the competitive graduate employment sector and to flourish professionally.

Our research culture, which embraces a lively and comprehensive community made up of our academic researchers, postdoctoral researchers and research postgraduates, enables our PGRs to:

- Engage with complex, challenging problems and real world issues
- Plan a well-structured programme of research in their chosen field
- Develop the research and organisational skills needed to complete a valuable and original piece of academic work
- Develop related skills - creativity, independence, team-working, problem-solving, communication, goal-setting – which are key to professional life and lifelong learning
- Share their knowledge and experience with fellow students, staff and other research professionals
- Become self-evaluating researchers who can assess their own development needs and use available training and support opportunities in order to make a significant contribution in their chosen field
- Enjoy and be enriched by their postgraduate research activity