

Good evening.

I am delighted to see so many of you here this evening to celebrate what has been, even by our University's standards, a remarkable year.

Universities are unique institutions. Places of transformation. Places where lives are changed. Places where knowledge is made and remade. Places where the future is forged.

Universities are also places that are constantly being reshaped. Today we celebrate one remarkable chapter in our university's history, and open a new chapter.

That new chapter began earlier this evening with the installation of the University's seventh Chancellor, Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea.

I am delighted to welcome Karan Bilimoria and his family and to thank him again for the enthusiasm with which he embraced the invitation to become our Chancellor.

Lord Bilimoria is a leading global businessman and Crossbench Peer who shares our passion for higher education and the value it brings to society and to the economy. He continues the long tradition of eminent Chancellors of this great University, who between them have conferred degrees on almost three hundred thousand students since 1901.

In the past fortnight, our five thousand proud students have graduated in this very hall, joining our ever-growing family of alumni from across the world. And amongst those alumni here this evening, I am delighted to welcome back Mrs Yasmin Bilimoria, Lord Bilimoria's mother.

It also gives me immense pleasure to welcome some of our distinguished Honorary Graduates who join us this evening, including Professor Michael Clarke, Professor Ian Morris, Mr Adrian Shooter, Dr Didar Singh, Dame Julie Moore, and, of course, Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea.

Welcome to you all.

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We are a university that expects to succeed, a university that has been forged through a century of achievements and a tradition of innovation. Never was this better exemplified than over the past year. The year began with Birmingham being named University of the Year by *The Times* and *Sunday Times*.

When I received the call from *The Times* to say we had been chosen I asked the editor 'why Birmingham?' This was not because I didn't believe we deserved it - clearly we did - but because I wanted to understand what others were seeing in us.

We had, the Sunday Times said, moved ahead in every league table and in every measure they used. That in itself was remarkable. Perhaps even more satisfying was being told that we were simply the most innovative university in the country. That was an affirmation of how we have striven to achieve over the past years.

We are in the top ten for graduate prospects in the UK, and the top 50 in the world, with 93 per cent of our students going on to work or further study within six months of graduating.

Employers praise our graduates not just for their academic ability, but for the character, adaptability, and drive that typifies our alumni.

And internationally, our academics are amongst the most influential and highly cited in the world.

For example a number of our outstanding researchers feature in the top one percent globally in terms of citations, according to the latest Thomson Reuters High-Impact list, and we are in the top three universities for jointly authored papers with Chinese academics. These things matter.

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Our international reach is expanding still further: we have strong and deepening associations with China, Brazil, North America, and India.

We have just announced a groundbreaking agreement with the world's largest genome research institute, based in China, to create the Joint Centre for Environmental Omics here on our Birmingham campus. We have 65 Brazilian doctoral students joining us through the Brazilian Government's Science Without Borders scheme.

In the United States we have established a trail-blazing strategic partnership between the University of Birmingham and the highly regarded University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; the most substantial strategic alliance between a leading US and UK university. And, in the last few months, we have signed agreements with a number of leading universities in India to enable Indian students to spend time studying here at Birmingham.

Our ability to develop collaborative partnerships with international government, business, and institutions of this standing is testament to our influence and our reputation for excellence across what is the widest range of academic disciplines studied at any English university.

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The backbone of our success is the remarkable quality of our academics. Our researchers continue to play a key role in tackling the more prominent challenges of our age, such as antibiotic resistance, dementia or economic sustainability, as well as sustaining that disciplinary strength and questing spirit that is at the heart of a great university.

Shortly we will be announcing the winners of our fourth annual Founders' Awards; recognising some of those academics who have made outstanding contributions.

The University is at its strongest when we put enthusiastic minds at the centre of our plans. To this end, we have recruited our third cohort of Birmingham Fellows, with applications from over 50 countries, bringing the total number to sixty five.

By creating a scheme unlike any other we have been able to attract highly talented early career researchers with the potential to make a truly global impact – and the significance of our scheme is clear when you consider that we've had more than two thousand applications for these fellowships over the last three years. This year we have recruited additional Birmingham Fellows committed to excellence and innovation in teaching.

And of course outstanding individuals require outstanding facilities, and so we continue to build for the future.

We've started building the High Temperature Research Centre; a sixty million pound collaboration between ourselves and Rolls-Royce, on an advanced manufacturing campus at Anstey, near Coventry, and the twenty four million pound Institute of Transformational Medicine; a collaboration between ourselves, the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, and the Children's Hospital under the umbrella of Birmingham Health Partners, our Academic Health Science Centre.

Working alongside our local partners, we also broke ground this year on the fifty million pound Birmingham Dental Hospital and Dental School – the first of its kind for fifty years. This will benefit the local community and our students; and cement our position as the home of first-class teaching and research in dentistry.

Our new Sports Centre and our Library development will not only improve the student experience, but will provide outstanding resources for the people of Birmingham.

And similarly, in another first for the UK, our University Training School will open in 2015 and be an outstanding springboard for secondary school and sixth form pupils of all backgrounds, and will pioneer new approaches to training the best teachers.

All of these ambitious developments, and a combined investment exceeding a quarter of a billion pounds, reflect our confidence and the clear vision needed to become a top 50 global university.

To quote from the Nobel Prize-winning writer, Antole France's 1896 speech to the Académie Française ; *"To accomplish great things we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe. "*

And I will leave you with one of our most extraordinary achievements over the last year, one which shows our ability to act and dream, to take on bold, transformatory initiatives; that is the establishment of the Birmingham Institute for Forest Research. This facility, which will be one of only three in the world, will enable us to explore the impact of climate and environmental change on woodlands and their resilience to pests and diseases.

This was achieved thanks to the remarkable generosity of former academic and alumnus Jo Bradwell and his wife Barbara who donated £15million to establish the Institute, but also because of our self-belief and our ability to move swiftly and harness the opportunity of such a transformational investment.

This is the largest gift to a University outside London and Oxbridge.

Alongside the generosity of numerous other donors, alumni, businesses and charities, it has put us to within touching distance of the £160 million target for our “Circles of Influence” fundraising campaign, which inspired our out-going Chancellor, Sir Dominic Cadbury. This is, by some distance, the most successful fundraising campaign in the region. We look forward to building on this under our new Chancellor.

So, as I said at the beginning, it has been a remarkable year. There is so much for us to be proud of, and I would like to thank all of you for the part you have played in our many and varied achievements over the last 12 months. This is a wonderful university to be associated with, and never have we done more to live up to our motto Per Ardua Ad Alta : through striving to great heights.

I would now ask you to give a warm welcome to our new Chancellor, Lord Karan Bilmoria.