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Out and about with our alumni

In order to continue our engagement with international alumni, members of our Development, Alumni and Business Engagement Division regularly travel to meet our alumni to support the development of the University's international alumni groups, meet with senior alumni and host informal alumni gatherings. This blog maps our adventures and interactions with you. You can also follow our travels on Twitter via **@birminghamalum (http://www.twitter.com/birminghamalum)** using the hash tag **#outandabout (https://twitter.com/search?q=%23outandabout&src=hash)**

Alumni and the student life cycle

Over the next two weeks (12-22 August 2013), Jade Bressington, Deputy Head of Alumni Relations, will be undertaking a Universitas 21 Fellowship project in America. This experience will examine the impact of alumni involvement within the student life cycle and the benefits this can bring to the wider University community. Jade will be **blogging (http://jadebressington.wordpress.com/)** about her time in America which you will be able to follow here or at **www.jadebressington.wordpress.com (http://jadebressington.wordpress.com/)**

Back to Birmingham - Sunday 21 April

Well, here I am, back again on the Chiltern line ready to return to Birmingham. What a week it has been! I've clocked up about 12,000 miles, I've met 32 alumni, chatted with two prospective students and introduced myself to one colleague based out of China. I feel like I'm just missing a partridge in a pear tree.

I've learnt a great deal about the University and our alumni during this recent visit. Questions like: 'What is the purpose of the visit?', 'What are the University's connections to Hong Kong' and 'How can we help?' have been asked regularly during my trip. Clearly there is more that we can do to communicate this to alumni internationally, not just in Hong Kong but in all regions which have a strong connection to the University. As you may have discovered in some of the earlier #outandabout blogs with my colleagues, there are a number of reasons why the University invests in international trips such as these. Universities are increasingly international - our student body hails from across the globe (at Birmingham we have over 4,000 international students from more than 150 different countries), 27% of our staff are non-UK nationals, we have offices in India, China,

Brazil and Brussels, and we have research, teaching, cultural and business collaborations in regions from the American Mid-West to the Pearl River Delta. Higher education is now truly international.

The University of Birmingham is consistently rated a top 100 global University, one of only a handful of UK Universities who can make this claim. However, we want to climb higher. We want to make the top 50 and we want to stay there. Alumni can help us in this ambition. You can talk openly and proudly about what it means to have a Birmingham education, you can encourage friends and family to consider the University as a destination for prospective students, research or business collaborations. You can share our successes with those in your networks. Perhaps, you could even print your Birmingham credentials on your business cards or post on company profiles, as Dr Leung (see earlier blog) proudly does?

There are things you need from us too, and these are some of the clearest ideas I am taking away from my trip. We need to tell you what are the highlights from the University that you might like to share with your networks. We need to share details of the collaborations in your region with you. We can be specific about the ways in which you can become more involved in the University. These are things we will start working on and we will let you know when we have something to report back.

Thank you to everyone for making my trip so memorable and worthwhile. To Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma (LLB Law, 1977) and his office for organising and hosting the wonderful dinner at the Hong Kong Club. To the enthusiastic committee members of BUUAHK for coordinating the alumni reception on the evening and taking lots of photos which will appear on the website soon. To the many alumni who turned out in force and shared touching and hilarious recollections of their time on the campus and advised me on what to do during my free afternoon in Hong Kong and how far to barter. To Frances (don't mention the name badge) and Caroline for organising this trip at such short notice. Thank you to you all. I loved my time in Hong Kong - the city and the alumni - I look forward to returning, whether on business or on holiday, in the very near future.

Super sub signing out.

Pride, pasion and paternoster lifts - Thursday 18 April

One of the things that I enjoy most about my job is meeting alumni. Sounds obvious right? With the need to be based in the office to deliver the great ideas that the team and our alumni come up with (and there are some brilliant ideas - our sector-first **Alumni Leadership Mentoring Programme (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/internships/mentoring/almp.aspx)**, the **EPS (http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=4837083&trk=myg_ugrp_ovr)** and other **LinkedIn communities (http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=118866&trk=hb_side_g)**, the **MBA Distinguished Leaders lectures (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/alumni/events/distinguished-leaders-series.aspx)** etc. etc.), weeks and occasionally months can pass by without meeting alumni. Occasions like last night are a wonderful opportunity to reconnect with alumni and to remind me of why, nearly ten years after joining the team, I still love my job and can't imagine doing anything more enjoyable or rewarding.

So, back to last night. When the event invitations were sent out last week, I was a little worried that I'd be spending the evening on my own. A week's notice isn't very much, we usually aim for three months. I needn't have worried, the passion and affection alumni hold for the University was truly touching and guests turned out in force. As I greeted alumni (without my name badge - please don't tell Frances), I heard tales about campus and favourite professors, which traits were attributed to various track and field athletes (Usain Bolt's pre-Olympic training was well regarded), riding the paternoster lifts (now replaced with swish intelligent lifts), the creation of the first Chinese student society. I was even treated to a selection of photos from Dr Paul Leung (MBChB Medicine, 1971) from his university days. An alum so proud, he includes the University on his business card. Wouldn't it be great if more alumni did this? It would be a wonderful demonstration of the pride in our university and support as we seek to build upon our

already strong reputation internationally.

Our prospective students also found the event useful. I was able to share information about the range of scholarships the University offers and alumni generously shared their experience of living in the UK and in Birmingham. This sort of advice is invaluable. The prospectus is a useful tool, but nothing brings the University to life quite like speaking to people who passionately call it home, even if it has been some years since they've last returned. Our alumni regularly offer their time to support activities such as this and we are incredibly grateful. Just last night, alumni participated in an online #AskanAlum **Twitter (http://www.twitter.com/birminghamalum)** conversation with prospective students.

Trips like these are valuable but time and resource means that official university business only takes us overseas occasionally. It is our international (and UK) alumni associations and groups who are the key individuals at maintaining the connections with the University and providing opportunities for alumni to get together. Last night, the **BUAAHK (http://www.facebook.com/groups/buaahk/?fref=ts)** commitee, led by David Ho (BEng Civil Engineering, 2006; MPhil Geography, 2008) turned out in full force and advocated the values of keeping in tough. They also took far superior photos to my fairly poor attempts - in my defence, I was enjoying the conversation so much that I rather forgot my official duties - which will appear on the website soon. We have alumni groups across the globe and are always happy to support groups who may want to form. To find out more, contact Kerrie Holland via **alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk (mailto:alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk)** .

As I prepare to leave Hong Kong, I am filled with a renewed sense of pride in the University. I am reminded of how important it is to our students and alumni who, in the words on an alumnus, 'learn to become adults. To think creatively and to think broadly.' I have a thousand and one ideas developing and look forward to sharing these with the team next week.

It has been a privilege to meet so many alumni. I hope we will meet again soon, but for now feel proud of your university, as we feel proud of you.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH CLAIRE O'SULLIVAN

What day is it anyway? - Tuesday 16 April

At the time of writing this (00.30, Wednesday 17 April), I've been in Hong Kong for a grand total of 18 hours but cant' yet fathom how it is Wednesday already. I left London on Monday lunchtime and haven't been to bed yet, so how can it be Wednesday?

I've decided to put this mere detail aside. The laptop says it is Wednesday so, so be it! I've just returned from the alumni dinner hosted by the gracious Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma (LLB Law, 1977). The surrounding, company and conversation were all most enjoyable and took my mind away from thoughts of what day it was.

The evening was a small, but perfectly formed, group of 8 alumni (three of whom lived at Griffin Close we discovered) plus me and the Vice-Chancellor. We discussed the latest news from the University – our partnerships with Rolls-Royce and **£60million investment in the High-Temperature Research Centre (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/latest/2012/10/8-Oct-University-of-Birmingham-and-Rolls-Royce-announce-60m-High-Temperature-Research-Centre.aspx)** , the Manufacturing Technology Centre, **CEPLER (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/facilities/CEPLER/index.aspx)** initiatives, campus developments, and much more. It was the University Training School which attracted most discussion – why are we doing it (primarily to support the training of our teaching), how will it be funded (student places will be government funded), will it be a boarding school (no), will there be entrance exams (no, it will be a truly comprehensive school) and many more. Alumni supported the initiative and were pleased to hear that we are being innovative and creative about our education provision.

The Vice-Chancellor also shared the University's plans to launch a MOOCs (Massive Online Open Courses) provision, due to start in September and the College of Arts and Law distance learning PhD. Discussion ensued on the changing landscape of global University education and the role of initiatives such as MOOCs being crucial to establish a strong international brand presence. Keep an eye on the alumni website for details about our MOOCs and distance learning programmes.

I thoroughly enjoyed this evening's dinner and would like to thank my fellow dinner guests, and Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma and his team for their wonderful hospitality.

I head off to bed (in the wee hours of Wednesday morning, which is sort of Tuesday night I suppose) even more enthused about **tomorrow's reception (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni/events/items/Hong-Kong-Drinks-17th-April-2013.aspx)** . More than 20 alumni have registered and we have invited some prospective students to join us too. I've popped up to the 41st floor to enjoy the view (it really is something spectacular, even with the mist that is currently lingering on the island), our appetisers have been pre-ordered and the diligent staff are ready to welcome us at 7pm tomorrow. If you are in Hong Kong and can join me, I'd love to see you.

But first, time for bed. Nighty night all.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH CLAIRE O'SULLIVAN

Just call me super sub - Sunday 14 April

My adventure to Hong Kong is underway. I'm on the Chiltern train from Birmingham Moor Street to London Marylebone. That doesn't sound as glamorous as saying that I'm at the airport or travelling over international waters. Some may wonder why I've even started to write this blog whilst I'm on a journey I've done at least 100 times. I, however, have now switched to #outandabout mode – I'm packed, travel documents are in order and I have a tabbed guide to the beautiful city I'm about to visit (Hong Kong, not London) - and am full of excitement for the few days that lay ahead.

As I'm writing this blog, I'm reflecting on how busy the last few days have been. You see, I wasn't supposed to be going to Hong Kong. My colleague, Christian Burden, was supposed to be going to Hong Kong. He has travelled to Honkers (I'm told that as a previous resident he is allowed to use this pet name) a couple of times in the last few years to build relationships with alumni but his trip, this time, has been foiled by a delay in his passport returning from the UK Border Agency (Christian is Australian and renewing his visa) so I've been drafted in as a super sub. After a frenzy of finding flights, accommodation, travel insurance etc, all was in order. I departed the office on Friday with a blue folder of every travel document, confirmation email that I needed; a box of alumni magazines and pin badges; a reminder to find my name badge in my home study (I really hope I've packed it, I'm almost certain that I did...) that Frances, our wonderful Alumni Administrator, could think to give me and that was it, I was ready for Hong Kong.

But why was Christian making the journey in the first place? Well, it all started a couple of years ago. The Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Eastwood, travels to Hong Kong once or twice a year on one of the international boards that he serves on. Keen to make the most of the trip, the Vice-Chancellor asked to meet a small group of alumni to provide them with an update on the University and to hear about how we might become closer linked to one another.

On Tuesday, there will be another of these small group dinners, jointly hosted with Chief Justice Geoffrey Ma (LLB Law, 1977). It is an opportunity for the University to meet with senior alumni; to listen to what is important to them; to hear their views on the University, and to answer any questions that they may have. It is immensely important that we do this. Our alumni are our greatest advocates – this gets said a great deal in higher education in the UK, but it is true. Our alumni understand the University, they hold it with warmth and affection, they care about what happens to the campus and to the 6000+ students who call it home and they have a stake in its continued strong reputation, they want to know that the Vice-Chancellor and his team are taking care of the legacy of the institution which means so much to them.

It is also our opportunity to share the University's plans with a small group of our alumni. To offer insights into our academic collaborations, to discuss how we support our students and to ask our alumni to support us in these endeavours by guiding us, by connecting us to those who can offer paid internships to our students and supporting us in any other way appropriate. We have a great group for dinner and I am looking forward to a lively discussion.

Keen to make the most of my trip and to meet with as many alumni as possible, an alumni reception has been added to the itinerary (our alumni in Hong Kong have hopefully received their invite, if you haven't please let us know by emailing **alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk (mailto:alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk)** it may be that we've lost touch with you and we would love to get back in contact). The invite went out a couple of days ago and within 15 minutes of hitting the 'send' button, 5 alumni had already registered. By the time the event comes around, I hope there will be many more. I was overwhelmed with this enthusiasm and felt buoyed that the short notice invitation wouldn't prevent alumni getting together for a great event.

As with the dinner, this is my opportunity to meet with alumni and to listen and to share (unfortunately the Vice-Chancellor has another engagement). I am keen to understand how the Alumni Office might connect with alumni outside of the UK, whether our international alumni are looking for something different from alumni in the UK. I am also excited to meet representatives from Birmingham University Alumni Association in Hong Kong (BUAAHK), our group of enthusiastic alumni who encourage alumni networking throughout the year. Hopefully, it will also be an opportunity for alumni to find out more about the group and to become involved. All alumni are welcome and full details can be found at: **http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni/events/items/Hong-Kong-Drinks-17th-April-2013.aspx (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni/events/items/Hong-Kong-Drinks-17th-April-2013.aspx)**

So this is my tale of how I became super sub and on my way to Hong Kong.

I'll be tweeting from **@birminghamalum (http://www.twitter.com/birminghamalum)** using the hashtag #outandabout during my trip. If you have any questions about why I'm here, how its going or any other comments on our alumni relations programme, feel free to tweet me – I'd love to hear from you.

Super sub over and out!

Out and about with our alumni
WITH KERRIE HOLLAND

Final words from India - Chennai, Friday 1st March

Firstly, I would like to start with a warm hello to Revd. Bavani Rajan, who told me last night that he has been reading my blogs! We had a small but perfectly formed meet-up in Chennai yesterday evening which was one of the most enjoyable alumni meetings I have ever attended. The conversation was wide-ranging and gave me a real insight into politics, religion and the caste system and the part they play in Indian life – absolutely fascinating to this former Politics and International Relations student. The alumni I met had graduated in 1993 and 2010 and their experiences were very different – one talked of the novelty of using an ATM machine for the first time when arriving in 1992, while the other came from a very different, modern, India entirely. Both talked of how transformative their time was at Birmingham and the impact it made on them personally and in professional life and aspiration.

I have met a number of very recent graduates, both in Delhi and here in Chennai, and I was able to meet another this morning who had unfortunately not been able to make the gathering last night. It's always good to meet them and makes me realise what a brave decision it is to pack up and study overseas (in most cases, their first visit to the UK was when they arrived at the University). Without exception, they have enjoyed their time at Birmingham – one alumnus sent me a message after a gathering to say 'It was lovely to meet - I feel rejuvenated as I've been missing England so much' – and many have commented that it totally changed them as people.

Another common theme from all alumni, whether they graduated thirty years or three months ago is that the quality of the education at Birmingham was very high, the level of independence in thought, research and learning is very different to that of many Indian educational institutions. I have been told that "We were rigorously taught to understand the concepts, not just to learn from books" and that "Birmingham taught me to think and learn independently". As a graduate of another UK Russell Group University (not Birmingham I'm afraid – I grew up twenty miles away and the thought of my parents being able to pop over whenever they liked was slightly off-putting to me at 18. Sorry, Mum and Dad. Please note I do live in Birmingham now.) I don't think I valued this expectation of independent thought highly enough until I was shown it by others with a non-UK perspective.

So, as my week in India draws to a close, I am reflecting on my trip. My final thoughts (work-related and less so) are, in no particular order:

• We have taught students from India for more than 100 years and this has produced some truly remarkable alumni,
• There really is a global community of alumni, who feel real affection for the University and are prepared to offer support and advice to us and to current students and recent alumni,
• Skype is the best thing in the world for mothers who travel for work – I have probably had more meaningful interaction with my children this week than usual since they are far keener to talk to me with when I can't see the mess in their bedrooms, or that they haven't brushed their teeth,
• Two-lane roads are really three-lane or more if you use your car horn enough,
• Curry for breakfast is an excellent idea (UK readers please note that this doesn't apply to last night's takeaway leftovers – get up earlier and make Sambar!)
• For Higher Education to continue to be one of the UK's most successful exports, and to ensure our companies and organisations have a global perspective, we need to enable our brightest international graduates to work in and contribute to the UK economy instead of returning to their home country immediately.
• That Birmingham itself is a city to be proud of, and one in which our Indian students felt very welcome.

It's been a wonderful trip to a wonderful country. Thank you to everyone who helped with the planning and execution – Frances, Aprajita, Pinkyla and Amy – and Dhanyavaadi to all the alumni I have interacted with for your time, enthusiasm and advice. Goodbye from India!

Out and about with our alumni
WITH JADE BRESSINGTON

HONGKONG;GUANGZHOUZ;DUBAI;HOME - Thursday 28th February

Wow, what a crazy but inspiring 24 hours!

By the time today is over, I will have visited 3 cities (OK, the airport in Dubai is cheating a little but, as my first blog attests, you can never count your chickens) in a little over 18 hours. On Weds evening, I had the pleasure of meeting the committee of the BUAAHK (Birmingham University Alumni Association in Hong Kong). It was fantastic to meet a number of alumni who clearly remain extremely committed to supporting and promoting the University of Birmingham. Comprised entirely of volunteers, they offer their time to provide regular social and networking opportunities for Birmingham graduates based in HK. The group welcomes graduates of all ages and from all disciplines and is keen to grow its membership base particularly with new graduates returning to HK.

We discussed a number of new opportunities for UoB group activity in HK, which I hope we will be able to collaborate on and deliver over the remainder of 2013. These included BUAAHK organising a 'Welcome Home' event for fresh graduates and returning international students in the summer, a pre-departure event prior to the start of term at which new students can benefit from alumni wisdom and advice, and adding an international dimension to our Alumni Careers Mentoring Scheme, which will benefit UoB students looking to work and live in HK post-graduation.
It was then on to GZ (see 'speedy train' blog of yesterday). The University has developed an exciting Centre in association with the Guangzhou Municipal Government; the Centre focuses on developing international research, corporate links and will soon be branching out into teaching through a collaborative student hub. Due to the University's heritage and long standing international outlook, we have a large number of alumni in mainland China and the team in Guangzhou are keen to develop strong

local alumni networks. This involved a meeting to discuss how we can support them in their aims and then an inaugural open gathering of local alumni in Guangzhou.

It was time to meet up with **Professor Peck (/staff/profiles/university/edward-peck.aspx)** again (after waving him off to meet Kerrie in India a few days earlier!) and we were delighted to meet with around 20 alumni who showed a huge amount of enthusiasm towards the University and its local activity and commitment to Guangzhou. We have a fledgling group in Shenzhen and, with local support and committed volunteers, we hope that this will grow to a thriving South China alumni group that can undertake many of the same activities that BUAAHK are now exploring. We will keep you posted on this via the website.

As I have noted before, the effectiveness and success of the University's alumni relations programme is underpinned by the support that we receive from alumni volunteers .We have a dedicated Volunteer Manager (my fellow blogger – Kerrie Holland) who is available to offer volunteer opportunities, guidance and practical support and we always want to hear from alumni who would like to get involved. Thank you to those that already do!

So, it is almost time to board my flight to Birmingham (please God, no medical emergencies this time), and therefore it seems a fitting time to close the blog. Over the last 10 days I have been really lucky to get under the skin of three fantastic cities, all of which contain plenty of successful UoB alumni. It is not an understatement to say that they truly are our greatest ambassadors. The University is absolutely committed to recognising this and to continuing its global engagement in these areas, among others.

I feel hugely proud that I have been privileged enough to meet some really amazing people; proud that there is so much to say to alumni about how the University is developing and, most of all, proud that, as a Birmingham alumna myself, I have been given the opportunity to represent 'my' University in this way. I hope that this blog has given you a small flavour of what we do and, most importantly, what is possible.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH KERRIE HOLLAND

Monkeys! And the seasoned traveller* moves on to Chennai - Chennai, Wednesday 27th/Thursday 28th February

I moved on to Chennai on Wednesday afternoon. Chennai is 1,300 miles away from Delhi and, in many ways, feels like a different country altogether. The pace is very different – I had not thought it possible that car horns could ever be used more than they are in Delhi, but it turns out I was wrong. Today, I would like to talk about employability – a priority area for all Universities and especially in the UK where the introduction of higher fees means we have to clearly show young people why they should continue into Higher Education, and the value of a Birmingham degree. Our reputation, calibre of our graduates and substantial investment in our award-winning **Careers Network (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/university/professional/as/employability.aspx)**, means that new graduates have excellent chances of finding graduate-level employment – the *International Herald Tribune* ranked us 55th in the world and 9th in the UK for post-qualification employability. We focus on work experience and paid internships to give our students the edge they need in a competitive graduate job market.

I had a very interesting discussion this morning with the VP for Design and Development at **TI Cycles (http://www.murugappa.com/companies/tube_investment/TICycles_index.htm)**, part of the huge Murugappa Group. The Murugappa Group is a $4.4bn turnover family business, sometimes referred to as the TATA of South India. Two senior family members both studied at Birmingham and have helped us to develop links with the business – another example of how good alumni relations can support the University. This resulted in a Birmingham student, Sean, undertaking an internship as part of our **Global Challenge Scheme (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/generic/internships/opportunities/globalchallenge/index.aspx)** in Summer 2012 and I was keen to discuss this and how we might be able to offer this to other students. Sean worked in Design and Development, researching and developing a product to appeal to urban consumers – you can read his **blog (https://careersbham.wordpress.com/category/global-challenge/)** (you will have to search through as the site includes blogs from all the students on the scheme – fascinating reading though!).

I was interested in the employer's perspective, and to discuss possible areas for development. The VP was enthusiastic about supporting students from Birmingham - he saw it as a huge opportunity for them to learn, and to apply their learning in a 'real-world' global setting. We also discussed possible projects for our Business School MBA and MSc Marketing students – one for me to discuss with the Business School on my return.

I asked for his advice for graduates seeking their first graduate role. His tips to help you stand out are:

> "Before you start looking, consider what you are really looking for. Are you mainly interested in work to make money, or as something you enjoy, and/or feel makes a postitive impact? Which industries interest you? Which companies in those industries are a good fit for your outlook and career aims?"

> "When you have an answer, pitch yourself to those companies, explaining why they appeal. Don't just circulate your resume indiscriminately - really take the time to identify what you can bring to them and tailor it to the company."

> "Make a niche for yourself - gain relevant experience through work experience, internships, your degree and your personal life."

I'm now looking forward to meeting Chennai alumni at the gathering this evening and hearing about the impact Birmingham has made on their lives.

Finally, and I've made you wait long enough...I did indeed get a picture of the Delhi monkeys on my way to the airport. It was a complicated operation and really is all thanks to my slightly bemused driver – I briefed him before we set off and when his sharp eyes spotted monkeys he obligingly swerved across three lanes of traffic so I could take the picture. Apparently a monkey had attacked someone last week so I'm afraid the photo is from the safety of the car, which is why it may be a little underwhelming. At least I've proved irrefutably that there are actually monkeys on the streets of Delhi. I'm not going to mention any Chennai wildlife until I already have the photographic proof though.

*The 'seasoned traveller' concept was invented by my dad in the late 1970s. To be a seasoned traveller, you must always be the last to board a mode of transport, and the last to disembark. My brother and I always suspected it was just because he liked to stay sitting down for as long as possible. I am usually too impatient but the rush of passengers defeated me at Chennai airport and I was, indeed, the last to leave the plane.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH JADE BRESSINGTON

Speeding through China - Hong Kong, Thursday 28th February

I am currently on a high speed train zooming through the Chinese countryside. 2 hours to travel between HK and GZ is pretty impressive especially as it avoids the laborious airport check in ritual and has only set me back £22 (and that is premium class. Think water, spacious comfy seats etc...). UK, you have A LOT to learn about comfortable, efficient and reasonably priced public transport.

Reflections on HK – a place that seems to look both East and West fairly effortlessly; a vibrant metropolis clearly focussed on business success and with a hard working population to match; and a city, despite its continued growth, that is faced with a whole range of all too familiar global issues e.g. impact of an ageing population, sky-high property prices, pressure to increase spend on healthcare, education etc etc. As I noted yesterday, these opportunities and challenges are the everyday reality for our graduates based in HK and is the future for any UoB students who may choose to make their lives there.

I was fortunate enough to meet a varied selection of alumni whilst in HK. UoB Business grads abound, that is for sure, but many other graduates have pursued a more portfolio approach to their careers. The Chem Eng grad who is now the Chief Financial Officer for Hong Kong's dominant TV broadcaster; the Mech Eng grad who is now Market Director for the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, the MBA grad who has held a number of senior position in Asia but has now taken an opportunity to return to HK as Managing Director of Macquarie Capital Limited. I could go on. The common thread is that every graduate I met was still extremely warm to the University and was happy to share their experiences and advice for current students, which included:

> "Think ahead. This starts before you apply for University. HK is a rapidly evolving economy. Think about what jobs and skills will be needed in 5 years' time and make sure you choose an appropriate subject"

> "HK is small. Make sure you start to build your networks as soon as you can. This can start in Birmingham through the Chinese Society or contacts on your course. These networks will hold you in good stead when you return "

> "HK is a unique place with business increasingly focusing on opportunities both East and West. Local and international graduates with proficiency in Mandarin and English and a working appreciation of the legal, political and cultural issues would set themselves apart in the job market"

> "Language skills are critical in HK. Fluency in English and Chinese is a major advantage for international students looking to secure placements, internships and work in HK'

All good advice, me thinks!

Now, the train is slowing and so I must close before I end up in another Chinese city! This afternoon, I will be meeting the team in the Guangzhou Office and then holding an alumni gathering with a relatively new UoB alumni group that has been formed in nearby Shenzhen.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH JADE BRESSINGTON

Two big days in HK - Hong Kong, Wednesday 27th February

I missed the HK Marathon by a day. As keen readers of my blog will know (I am sure there are many and that every single one of you has been hanging out for my next Asian instalment), I am mildly obsessed with running. I fear the lure of an international 26.2 mile challenge may have been a little too much for me to handle had I know well in advance and so, on this occasion, I am seriously glad that my naivety got the better of me. Spectating, however, would have been awesome.

Despite missing the marathon, I have been lucky enough to be present on another important day for the city - HK's 'Budget Day'. Not something that the average tourist would normally be aware of however, as many of the alumni I have met today work within the world of finance, this was a hot topic of conversation! HK is doing well. They have reported a surplus and continued growth is predicted for 2013. Good news. However, that said, everyone that I have met seems to be working damned hard to make the economy sing.

That is the fascinating thing about being out here; talking to individuals who share an experience (University of Birmingham) yet have gone on to carve out their own individual pathways and successes in different industries, environments and under different circumstances. Things like 'Budget Day' remind me that local activity is what shapes the day to day lives and careers of our alumni and we, as a university, need a strong feedback loop, to ensure our continued contact is sensitive to the environment in which our graduates are living and working. This is why trips like this are so important and why we must ensure that our contact with international alumni is appropriate, relevant, tailored and, above all, regular and consistent.

Anyway, much more to say on today but I will fill in the detail tomorrow. It is time for me to go to bed. I have an early date with a treadmill…

Out and about with our alumni
WITH KERRIE HOLLAND

STILL no monkeys – but a very nice alumni gathering – Delhi,Tuesday 26th February

I think I may have created a rod for my own back with the promise of monkey pictures (actually, they are macaques, according to an alumnus at this

evening's event). The monkeys of Delhi have proved very elusive today as well. There was an incident with an eagle at lunchtime, but you will have to read the whole blog for the educational bit before I tell you about it.

I had a really interesting day today, lack of monkeys aside. I had arranged to spend some proper time with Aprajita Kalra and Pinkyla Wazilingpa, the staff in our India Office. We've had lots of communication by phone and e-mail between the UK and India but you can't really beat an occasional old-fashioned meeting in my opinion. It was good to catch up on their priorities – student recruitment and facilitating collaboration between UoB and Indian education and research institutions and business. Alumni have been providing fantastic support with both objectives, and we came up with a number of ideas to develop this further.

Later on in the day, we held the Delhi alumni get-together. I love these gatherings – pretty much wherever you are in the world it's possible to get a group of people talking passionately about Birmingham. The top memories are usually the same: the halls of residence; the paternoster lifts in Muirhead Tower; graduation in the Great Hall and our beautiful campus. We had several young alumni in attendance which was great – they had completed their Masters degrees and graduated just a couple of months ago in December. Older alumni were clearly concerned about student employability, particularly now it is harder for Indian students to get UK work experience after graduation, but the recent alumni were positive about their prospects and really valued their experience at Birmingham. What a loss for the UK that we are less likely to benefit from these exceptionally bright international graduates following the post-study work visa changes. I'll be discussing how we can support these graduates with our (multiple award-winning!) **Careers Network (/alumni/careers/graduatecareers/careersnetwork.aspx)** on my return, and alumni had a number of suggestions as to how they could help too.

Anyway, on to the real reason many of you will be reading this. I had lunch in a restaurant in Lodi/Lodhi Park with the India Office team – a lovely park with amazing tombs from the 15th and 16th century. We were sitting under an umbrella (a nod to me being more used to snow than sunshine) but the table next to us was not, and an eagle – an actual eagle! – swooped from the sky and stole their food. I was beside myself with excitement, but the women at the table just asked for an umbrella so it didn't happen again.

I'm leaving Delhi tomorrow for the 1,300 mile trip to Chennai – India really is a big country – so it's my last chance for monkey pictures. I'll be doing my very best for you, I promise.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH MATT MANGAN

Top tips from Kuala Lumpur's top alumni - Kuala Lumpar, Tuesday 26th February

My final day in Kuala Lummpar ended with an informal alumni reception for alumni in the glorious Mandarin Oriental Hotel next to the Petronas Towers. Despite the traffic (a given in Kuala Lumpur) and the rain, I was delighted to meet more than 20 alumni ranging from the graduating years of 1967 to 2010. The gathering really demonstrated to me the global nature of Higher Education and the mobility of our graduates. I met a German alumnus who did his UG in Germany, his MBA in Birmingham, and is now working with VW in Mayalsia and a Malaysian alumna who studied in Malaysia and China, did her UG in the States, and then her MBA in Birmingham before returning home to Malaysia. Conversely our younger Malaysian alumni mentioned that many of their peers have gone to Australia and the USA for work, highlighting a real 'brain drain' problem for Malaysia at the moment that the Government is hoping to address. It's clear that our alumni networks can help our students to find employment and each other to progress in their careers – I was therefore particularly pleased the hear that during the evening one of our alumni offered to help another alum to secure a new role via his high profile connections - alumni networks in action!

Conversations at the alumni event swiftly moved to Muirhead Tower (news of the new Starbucks has reached Kuala Lumpur already), and the Bramall Music Building which secured a resounding thumbs up from all attendees. I also asked our alumni for any advice they would give to our current students. Here is a summary:

> "Take on challenges at work, seek them out, and show that you are willing"

> "When starting out on your career, earn your reputation by doing every task you are asked to do well, no matter how big, small or menial"

> "Be flexible! Too many graduates are fixated by following a certain career path. Your journey will deviate, and may not be linked to your degree, but if you remain flexible and adaptable to change then the opportunies will present themselves"

> "Try a Balti in Ladywood!" (Unfortunately they didn't specify which one!)

As I prepare to head home I reflect on the last seven days with excitement about the opportunities for UoB in Singapore, Malaysia and Southeast Asia. We have strong and developing alumni networks, regional activity via our **Business (/schools/business/index.aspx)**, **Law (/schools/law/index.aspx)**, **Music (/schools/lcahm/departments/music/index.aspx)** and **Engineering Schools (/university/colleges/eps/index.aspx)**, and a passionate group of senior leaders who are keen to be ambassadors of the University and supporters of our activities – together we can enhance the University's international reputation and continue to support the needs of all our alumni in the region!

Now....what to do when you have to wait till 2am for your flight…

Out and about with our alumni
With Kerrie Holland

No monkeys.. but a visit to the President's House makes for a good day - Delhi, Monday 25th February

Firstly, an apology to anyone who has tuned in for pictures of monkeys as promised at the end of my last blog. I'm afraid that I haven't seen any today, but rest assured that no monkey is safe from my camera tomorrow.

Professor Edward Peck, (/staff/profiles/university/edward-peck.aspx) Dr Luis Cabrera (/staff/profiles/government-society/cabrera-luis.aspx) and I went to the President's House this afternoon, which is where the Cabinet Secretariat is based, to meet one of our most senior alumni in India – Cabinet Secretary Mr. A K Seth. After many security checks, we found ourselves in a truly imposing, beautiful building, designed by Lutyens in the 1930's. Mr Seth was a gracious host and shared his memories of his time at Birmingham including visiting the Barber Institute and the draughty Muirhead building. He confirmed that the University of Birmingham has a good reputation in India, testament to global recognition of our **research (/research/index.aspx)** and quality of teaching, the work of our International Relations team and India office, and the calibre of our students and alumni. Many of our high-ranking alumni in India, and across the world, studied with our **International Development Department (/schools/government-society/departments/international-development/index.aspx)**, a multi-disciplinary department committed to poverty reduction through the development of effective governance systems, and we continue to welcome talented students who go on to achieve great things.

I went for an evening stroll in Delhi to Janpath Market which was an experience in itself – for those of you who may have missed it on twitter **#outandabout (https://twitter.com/search?q=%23outandabout&src=hash)**, I learned I officially have good hair. It was confirmed by a man who wanted to clean my ears (as he was brandishing a sharp metal implement, they remain uncleaned) but am still counting it as a compliment. It's an amazing city, green and very beautiful, but in a constant state of building and very hectic. Somewhere I would definitely want to visit again, but with plenty of leisure time to be a proper tourist next time!
I'm really looking forward to meeting alumni at our drinks gathering tomorrow evening at the Patiala Peg bar – and thanks to the alumni who have commented on my trip in the **Birmingham Business School Alumni Facebook Group (https://www.facebook.com/bbsalumni)** – I'm sorry I won't get to Mumbai this time but thank you for your good wishes.

Out and about with our alumni
With Matt Mangan

A family affair - Kuala Lumpar, Tuesday 26th February

My day started with an early morning coffee with the ex-Chairman of Shell China, an incredibly distinguished gentleman with an impressive career in the oil industry spanning a number of decades. Despite not being back to Birmingham for some time his passion for the University remains strong. It transpires that he, like many before and after him, came to Birmingham on a Shell scholarship due to our international reputation in the **School of Chemical Engineering (/schools/chemical-engineering/index.aspx)** (which continues to be strong today). I was also impressed by the strong UoB network that our senior alumni leaders have maintained across Southeast Asia and China. Their desire to reconnect with the University and to support the development of our strategic plan is clear and we look forward to working with them over the coming years.

My second meeting of the day entailed a visit to the world famous **Royal Selangor Pewter Factory and Visitor Centre (http://www.royalselangor.com/rs2/visitorcentre.php)**. The pewter firm has been moulded by four generations and it is still very much a family business, little did I know quite how involved the family are. I was there to see Yoon Li, UoB alumnus and General Manager of RS. He was running a little late so I was offered a tour of the visitor centre by an incredibly inspiring tour guide and expert sales person – during the 20 minute tour she tried to close a deal three times on two Pewter tea pots at £250+ each (the craftsmanship and quality were second to none, thankfully I didn't have space in my travel bag for such precious items!) It transpires that this expert sales person was in fact Yoon Li's auntie and one of the Directors of the company (I think she may have thought that I was a well heeled businessman – a suit and a tie can work wonders).

The family connection continued when I sat down for lunch in the visitor centre with Yoon Li. Following the amazing Malaysian Chicken Rice we were treated to three incredibly tasty home cooked cakes. As colleagues in my office will testify I am never one to turn down a good cake. And these cakes were good, really good! Even better, they are made by Yoon Li's wife who is a **Computer Science (/schools/computer-science/index.aspx)** alum from UoB – I'm not sure if cake making is part of their curriculum but I'm going to go to the department when I'm back on campus just to make sure I'm not missing out on cake. I had a really good meeting with Yoon Li and I'm pleased that Royal Selangor is going to offer internships and placements to some of our students in the coming year. It's an amazing company and I would recommend a tour of the visitor centre, the factory, and the cakes next time you are in Kuala Lumpur.

My third meeting was with another leading alumnus and founder of a rapidly growing and successful engineering company that provides services to the oil and gas industry around the word. During the conversation we identified that their current activities in oil and gas and their growth area in renewable energy and biomass maps well against our strengths within the **College of Engineering and Physical Science (/university/colleges/eps/index.aspx)**.

We agreed that it would be good to connect our senior team in the College to the company so that we can explore potential collaboration in the future. We also highlighted that UoB will be able to help the organisation with their need for excellent engineering graduates and we plan to follow up on the opportunity to offer internships, yearlong placements, and graduate trainee positions with them asap. We also hope to arrange a student focussed roundtable discussion at the Business School later in the year on 'Doing business in Asia' which I'm sure will enhance our programmes back in Edgbaston.

Out and about with our alumni
With Jade Bressington

A tale of two countries - Singapore & Hong Kong, Monday 25th February

Today started with a run. If any of you know me, running is a pretty big part of my life and so an early morning outing along the Singapore River was the perfect mental prep for another week 'out and about'. My pre-breakfast space also featured some catching up on correspondence from my fellow **#outandabout (https://twitter.com/search?q=%23outandabout&src=hash)** colleagues, Kerrie (in India) and Matt (in Malaysia). I am constantly astounded by how small the world is becoming in terms of ease and speed of global communication. Amazing.

As the title of today's blog suggests, I started the day in Singapore and will be ending it in Hong Kong. In fact, I am currently writing this in airspace somewhere between the two! This morning I visited **Singapore Institute of Management (http://www.sim.edu.sg/Pages/index.aspx)**, a private provider of global education in Singapore, who UoB have partnered with in order to deliver Business Management degree programmes at both UG and MBA level.

Thanks to a 'flying faculty' model, SIM students experience exactly the same programme, teaching and lecturers as they would do if they made the 7,000 mile journey to University House. Understandably these programmes have been very popular, with both local and international students, who want to be based in Singapore but experience and benefit from a UK, Russell Group, qualification. The FT UG programmes started in 2009 and we now have 180 students studying for business management qualifications with SIM. Global mobility is encouraged and the students are offered the opportunity to spend a term on campus in Edgbaston or at any other U21 institution.

Whilst our modular MBA programme has been delivered in Singapore for over 25 years, it was moved to SIM to sit alongside UoB's UG provision in 2011. We currently have 170 students studying at this level, and due to its modular approach, students can complete their programme by undertaking modules in Hong Kong and in Birmingham as well as in Singapore – perfect for high flying individuals with globally focused careers.

SIM's facilities are modern and geared to the student. They are expanding rapidly and are building a new sports facility and arts centre (to be completed in 2014) to complement a fantastic student hub, which pulls together all student facing services. Sounds frighteningly familiar to UoB and demonstrates how all education providers have to invest in their facilities to ensure they are fit for purpose and are attractive to the modern student!

My main meeting today focused on the possibility of exporting our highly successful **Distinguished Leaders Series (/schools/business/alumni/events/distinguished-leaders-series.aspx)**. The series aims to bring students into contact with a selection of UoB graduates who are now senior leaders within business to enrich the experience of our MBA students. We have a number of highly successful UoB graduates in Singapore (see previous blog entries for a taste of these!) and this gives us the opportunity to showcase their success whilst developing our local students and offering all UoB alumni in Singapore the chance to network and connect with each other at the events.

Good ideas are only successful if they are backed by exceptional support and therefore the majority of our meeting focused on bottoming out the logistics of such a high profile series. With SIM's support, we have now agreed an effective method of delivery and I am pleased to announce that, all being well, the Singapore version of the Distinguished Leaders Series will launch in November 2013. The inaugural event will be timed to coincide with the next cohort of UoB students graduating from the programme and entering into our highly successful (and rapidly expanding) UoB alumni network in Singapore!

Out and about with our alumni
WITH KERRIE HOLLAND

It's just a jolly, isn't it? - Delhi, Sunday 24th February

I imagine that, if you've read my colleague Jade's tale of flight stress and woe, rapidly followed by the hosting of a brilliantly well-attended Singapore alumni event within mere seconds (well, two hours) of arrival, you'll know where I'm going with my controversial title of this blog. It's not really a jolly. At all.

Having said that, travelling overseas to meet our alumni is really exciting. I love my job, and frequently meet really interesting UK alumni who have done really interesting things. There's something really special about meeting our alumni overseas though. If anything, I would say their connection with, and affection for, both the University and the city of Birmingham is deeper and stronger in many cases than that of our UK-based alumni. Whether ex-pats or students who travelled from their home country to study at Birmingham and have since returned, the University holds a special place in the hearts of many overseas alumni.

So, why am I in India? Again, not just a jolly. As one of the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China), India is a key strategic area for UoB. We've taught students from India almost from the creation of the University over a century ago and, while the numbers of Indian students are significantly reduced across UK Universities due to the post-study work visa changes, we continue to welcome them today. We have a growing focus on research collaborations with institutions in India, including enhancing talent in **atomic physics (/news/latest/2013/02/20Feb-UK-India-project-set-to-enhance-talent-in-atomic-physics-research.aspx)** research, **tackling tuberculosis (/news/latest/2011/12/UK-and-Indian-researchers-unite-to-fight-global-tuberculosis-epidemic.aspx)** and establishing a **Global Justice Programme (http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/globaljustice/news.html)** with Delhi University and Yale. To paraphrase **Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Edward Peck (/staff/profiles/university/edward-peck.aspx)** at the working dinner this evening, as a research-focused University, we should play to our strengths internationally.

So, on to the reason for my trip. My team - Development, Alumni and Business Engagement (DABE – pronunciation still in dispute) – work with alumni and external organisations to support the University's strategic aims. This could include mentoring students or offering internships to help our colleagues in the University's Careers Network achieve the employability targets for our students, for example. Or, as in this case, supporting our global engagement strategy. In India, this includes access to networks and contacts, support with student recruitment (who better to tell prospective students why they should study at Birmingham?) and guidance, advice and local knowledge. This is the first time a DABE staff member has visited India, so it's a great opportunity to meet some key alumni and get firsthand knowledge of what they would value from their University, and how they may be able to help us.

I landed in Delhi at 4pm today, and kicked off what promises to be an action-packed week three hours later attending a dinner with alumnus **Dr A Didar Singh (http://www.ficci.com/about-sg.asp)** (MSocSc Development Administration, 1996), Secretary General of FICCI - the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Professor Edward Peck (freshly arrived from Singapore – see Jade's blog posts below), and representatives of Delhi University and other key institutions in Delhi. I learned that India is apparently short of some 2,000 universities, and that developing research skills amongst students for post-grad study is a priority – implications for Birmingham given our research strengths. Dr Singh had some innovative suggestions for internships and graduate job support for our students, which Professor Peck and I will follow up.

Top discoveries of the day include realising that what I thought were authentic Indian curries from the restaurants of Ladypool Road aren't authentic at all, and that Delhi streets feature both packs of dogs and families of monkeys. Off to bed now after 26 hours of travelling and working – more to follow. Including pictures of monkeys if I can manage it, since I believe that is what blog-readers generally like...

Out and about with our alumni
WITH JADE BRESSINGTON

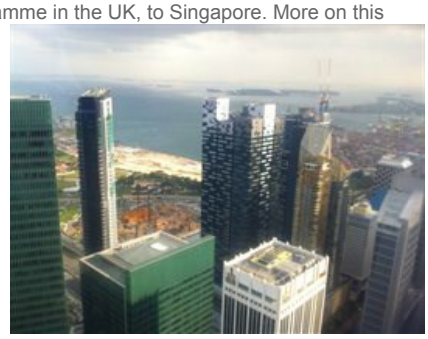
High dining with leading alumni - Singapore, Friday 22nd February

Thanks to one of our leading alumni we were able to gain access to the exclusive Tower Club of Singapore. With stunning views over the bay from the 71st floor we hosted a dinner with some of our most senior alumni including the Executive Chairman of PWC Singapore and the Chief Executive of Capitaland, one of Asia's largest real estate companies. We were encouraged by their warmth and willingness to support the University in further enhancing our international reputation.

Even though many of them had not been back to campus since the 1970s/1980s, they spoke of their time in Birmingham with great fondness; peculiarly the no. 61/ 62/63 buses was a memory that was shared as was the increased popularity of the Malaysian student society once they started incorporating food into the meetings! The loss of the Muirhead paternoster was greeted with sadness but there was great celebration that the building still exists and now houses some of the finest office and teaching space on campus. In the 1970s it was primarily renowned for being a wind tunnel!

With memories shared and University updates provided, discussion turned to how they could individually and collectively help us to enhance our reputation in Singapore and Asia. All of our guests were extremely pro-UoB however, felt that we needed to be more explicit about our successes and developments locally – this is something that they are happy to support and we discussed how our alumni are our greatest advocates, particularly internationally.

One of the areas of particular interest was how critical it is for the University to support the employability of our graduates. Internships and graduate employment opportunities within their organisations were discussed and we hope to be able to confirm details of these in the immediate future. We also discussed bringing our highly regarded **Distinguished Leaders Series (/schools/business/alumni/events/distinguished-leaders-series.aspx)**, developed in conjunction with our MBA Programme in the UK, to Singapore. More on this soon.



Overall it was an intense but hugely interesting and productive day. We were fortunate enough to meet with some fantastic people who really demonstrate the success of our international graduate community and we are extremely grateful that they are prepared and able to actively support us to fulfil the University's global ambitions.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH JADE BRESSINGTON

50 alumni in a room with a view - Singapore, Thursday 21 February

So we made it to Singapore with all of two hours to spare before our appointment with tens of alumni. Nothing like cutting it fine. Thanks Emirates!

Joined by **Professor Edward Peck (/staff/profiles/university/edward-peck.aspx)**, Pro-Vice Chancellor and Head of the College of Social Sciences, we made our way to the 71st floor of the Stamford Hotel to meet with more than 50 UoB graduates, ranging from an alumnus who was last on campus in 1956 through to those graduating as recently as 2012. The University has deep connections in Singapore; we deliver UG and **MBA programmes (/postgraduate/courses/taught/business/singapore-mba.aspx)** locally using UoB faculty who fly in to teach the same programmes as those delivered on campus in conjunction with the Singapore Institute of Management. We now have more than 350 students enrolled on these programmes and it was fantastic to be able to meet with a number of individuals who have graduated from them to hear about their experiences and their strong affinity to a campus, which many of them have not yet visited. The recent photos posted on Facebook of Edgbaston in the snow were a hot topic of conversation!

In addition, Music has strong links with the Raffles Academy; this enables excellent students from the Raffles Institution and Raffles Girls School to enter the second year of our **BA Music Programme (/undergraduate/courses/music/music.aspx)** and we were delighted to be joined by an alumna who is now managing the programme locally. Birmingham is one of only 19 UK Law Schools where our degree is recognised in Singapore and some UoB bred lawyers were among the graduates we met. In fact one alumnus had decided to bring along his son, who is planning to undertake a law degree in the UK, to find out more about the programme. Fingers crossed the enthusiasm and warmth of feeling towards Birmingham in the room has secured his application!

Among the guests were at least two UoB couples and many more who had met their partners during their time at Birmingham. There were many comments and compliments on how the campus and city has developed - Google maps and YouTube had clearly been used as prep for the evening - and it was fantastic to hear many varied memories of graduates' time on campus. The evening definitely provided food for thought in terms of how we sustain the interest and support that was definitely present in the room – more on this soon!

The view from the 71st floor was pretty exceptional even despite the tropical rain that quickly drew in. As the light faded Matt and I were particularly excited to see 'UOB' emblazoned on one of the nearby skyscrapers. Our excitement turned to slight disappointment however as were informed that this stood for 'United Overseas Bank' – nothing like local knowledge to quickly bring you up to speed!

Tonight we will be meeting with some of our most distinguished Birmingham graduates in Singapore and Malaysia to update them on how the University is developing and discuss our continued engagement in Asia. We're still tweeting so keep an eye on **@birminghamalum (http://www.twitter.com/birminghamalum)** to follow our progress.

Out and about with our alumni
WITH JADE BRESSINGTON

The long road to Singapore - Wednesday 20 February

Matt Mangan and I are currently on our way to Singapore to meet with a number of our senior alumni, support the development of a local alumni group, explore potential enhancements to the student experience for **Birmingham students taught in Singapore (http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/courses/postgraduate/taught/business/singapore-mba.aspx)**, and meet with as many of our local alumni as possible through an informal gathering.

However, sitting in a hotel room at Dubai airport penning this post was not part of the Master Plan. The Master Plan involved a smooth and productive flight to Singapore, meetings with a couple of our senior alumni, and then plenty of time to prepare for our informal alumni gathering of more than 60 local graduates. However, throw in an already delayed flight, a minor medical emergency on the runway and a subsequent missed connection and you have a couple of people quickly formulating a new 'Master Plan' via the help of a blackberry, helpful colleagues back at base camp, and extremely willing and flexible alumni. Thank you all!

So having left Birmingham on Tuesday 19 February, we should (all being well) arrive in Singapore on the afternoon of Thursday 21 February. Having to stay awake for an additional 24 hours has been a bit of a challenge to say the least, particularly when we have been minus our bags and crucial phone / laptop chargers! Emails, caffeine, a quick escape from our beige hotel (to witness a mall that houses an aquarium and a waterfall - I am pretty sure this is accurate, we are both extremely tired) have been the order of the day but both of us are very much looking forward to the moment we land in Changi airport and can start to implement the new version of the master plan in earnest

Please follow our travels via this blog and on twitter via **@birminghamalum (http://www.twitter.com/birminghamalum)**. We would love to hear your worse layover stories. After all, we still have 6 hours till we take off…

The bloggers

(#JadeBressington) Jade Bressington
Deputy Head of Alumni Relations and College Alumni Relations Manager, Social Sciences

My role is focussed on developing relationships with senior alumni who are able to support the ambitions of the College of Social Sciences in a voluntary capacity. I am responsible for developing, planning and managing the alumni relations strategy and team within the College as well as implementing a number of College and University-wide projects and initiatives. I am a proud University of Birmingham alumna myself and also have the responsibility of being Deputy Head of Alumni Relations across the institution.

Kerrie Holland
Volunteer Relationship Manager

I work with alumni around the world to support the University with their time, expertise, contacts and advice. Alumni help us in many ways - from mentoring students, offering internships, delivering guest lectures, connecting us with business and key individuals and sharing their networks. I look after alumni activity in India, the US, China and Brazil - key strategic areas for research collaborations, student recruitment and future development.

(#MattMangan) Matt Mangan
Head of Principal Gifts

My role in Development, Alumni and Business Engagement is to engage with our senior alumni and business leaders. I have been here for seven years and seek involvement from these high profile individuals to help develop the University's reputation both in the UK and internationally.

Claire O'Sullivan
Head of Alumni Relations

My role is to ensure that we have a high quality alumni relations programme that offers something to each of our 170,000 alumni wound the globe. The alumni team is here to help you develop stronger connections with the University around the areas that interest you.

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