RAE confirms Birmingham's position as West Midlands' top university

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The results of a UK-wide research quality survey published today (Thursday 18 December) prove that the University of Birmingham's research power has global reach and leads the world in a broad range of disciplines.

According to the results of the Research Assessment Exercise 2008, 89.9% of the University of Birmingham's research activity has international impact. The Research Fortnight's University Power Ranking*, based on quality and quantity of research activity, puts the University of Birmingham as the West Midlands' top university and 12th in the UK, leading the way across a broad range of disciplines including Primary Care, Cancer Studies, Psychology and Sport and Exercise Sciences.

Research Fortnight's Power Ranking places the University's Primary Care researchers top in the UK. With a world class research programme focusing on the impact of major diseases among the population, the researchers also have significant expertise in smoking cessation, clinical decision-making, exercise and how ethnicity affects health.

Birmingham is named as the leading Cancer Studies centre outside London (only trumped by the Institute of Cancer Research). Particular strengths include cancer cell signalling, the DNA damage response, gene and immunotherapy and cancer viruses. One example is the use of a genetically modified cold virus to target and kill tumour cells. Rather than delivering a drug, the virus acts as a method of delivering proteins that cause cancer cells to die. Clinical trials are another key area with the University having one of the largest clinical trials capacity in Europe.

Psychology at the University ranks third in the country. Topping the region's universities its research has resulted in greater understanding of the relations between brain, mind and behaviour, and the application of this understanding to human problems. Demonstrating the impact of the research on society, the University's research is already helping with alcohol and drug- related issues, and the impact of drugs in other potentially addictive behaviours such as gambling.

Second in the country for Sports Science, researchers at the University have been investigating the effects of stress on immunity and vaccination response showing recently that long term caring can adversely impact our immunity.

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham, Professor Michael Sterling, said: 'I am really delighted that the University of Birmingham has achieved this superb set of results in the RAE 2008.

'Based on the quality and quantity of research activity to be top in the West Midlands and 12th across the UK is a fantastic achievement and reflects the University's commitment to carrying out research that is agenda-setting and has a positive impact on society. These results are a tribute to the huge amount of hard work, dedication and original thinking of members of staff across the University.

'I am particularly proud of the enormous number of disciplines which have been recognised as being of international excellence. It is also evident that, at Birmingham, research outputs have driven the knowledge economy, reaching policy-makers, the NHS, government bodies, industry, commerce and the local community.'

When looking at specific disciplines, many other areas of the University's research have also been recognised as world-leading. Music at the University was highly rated.

With 85% of its research ranked either world-leading or internationally excellent, Music is ranked second nationally.

The department has a long tradition of research in composition, early music and performance practice, and electroacoustic music – Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre (BEAST) is an international leader.

When it comes to size Physics may not be one of the largest research departments in the UK but the quality of its 4* research activity puts it comfortably within the top five in the UK. Researchers in particle physics have been heavily involved with the world's biggest physics experiment at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN in Geneva. Researchers are also part of a worldwide collaboration that is looking for gravitational waves – tiny distortions of space-time that were predicted by Albert Einstein in the early 20th Century, but have never been directly detected.

This is one of the most fundamental research areas in modern science as the direct observation of these waves will allow totally new insights into the physics of black holes and may provide a direct view of what happened just after the Big Bang.

Mechanical Engineering is ranked seventh in terms of its world-leading and internationally excellent research. This includes vehicle technology – the interaction of fuel and engine to investigate the performance of new fuels and to minimise emissions as well as developing intelligent systems for predicting component failure during the lifetime of a vehicle.

The microengine, invented by mechanical engineers at the University, is a tiny engine only a few millimetres wide that could replace a standard battery which could be used to charge mobile phones and lap top computers in a matter of seconds thereby eliminating the need to recharge them frequently.

Another world-leading research discipline is European Studies, ranked second for its 4* research. The European Research Institute (ERI) was created as an academic department in its own right in 2005 and acts as a hub within several national and international research networks, reflecting its commitment to a broad and interdisciplinary approach to European Studies.

In Law, another small but high powered research team is ranked seventh in terms of world-leading or internationally excellent research. The academics provide a focus for research in Judicial Administration, European and Medical Law and this is evidenced through the £750,000 grants secured over the last five years and includes research for the Ministry of Justice for major empirical projects on juries, small claims, civil enforcement, lay magistrates and the satellite tracking of criminal offenders.

Ends

Notes to Editors:

The Vice-Chancellor, senior staff and individual members of research teams across the University are available for comment. Please contact Rachel Burrows, see below.

The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)
The RAE is a rigorous assessment of research quality in higher education, which takes place periodically across all UK universities, by the UK's higher education funding bodies.

The RAE is conducted jointly by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL).

The assessment process takes many months and consists of disciplined-based peer-reviewed panels considering written submissions to units of assessment, which take into account the number of research active staff, research outputs, research students and studentships, external research income, research structure and strategies, and

into account the number of research active staff, research outputs, research students and studentships, external research income, research structure and strategies, and indicators of esteem.

Research Assessment Exercises have been held in the UK in 1986, 1989, 1992, 1996 and 2001.

Research Assessment Exercise 2008
The Research Assessment Exercise 2008 measures the universities' research performance from 1 January 2001 to 31 October 2007.

The results of the RAE 2008 will be used to help decide how more than £1.5 billion per year will be allocated in research grants to British universities from 2009/10 onwards. HEFCE will announce how funds will be allocated in March 2009.

Research Fortnight's Power Ranking
The Power Index scores the Unit of Assessment (UoA) submission with the largest Market Share as 1.0. All other submissions are then expressed as a proportion of the largest Market Share.

If the largest Market Share is 2.50%, then a UoA submission with a Market Share of 2.00% would have a Power Index of 2.0% / 2.5% = 0.8

Quality Profiles
The RAE 2008 differs to the 2001 assessment, as, rather than receiving one simple score from one to five star per unit of assessment, universities receive a quality profile indicating the proportion of the research that meets each of four quality levels or is unclassified.

4*	Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour
3*	Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence
2*	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour
1*	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour
u/c	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment

University of Birmingham's RAE submission
The University of Birmingham achieved £488,175,528 of research income from 2001 to 2007 – that's an average of £415,617 per full time equivalent member of staff returned to the RAE over the period.

For more information on the RAE at Birmingham, visit**www.research.bham.ac.uk**, and for a full listing of all the national results, visit the RAE website at **www.rae.ac.uk**.

Further media information:

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