

Birmingham signs strategic alliance agreement with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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The University of Birmingham and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have announced a strategic partnership which is unprecedented in the way that leading research intensive universities go about enhancing their research power and global impact.

The agreement was signed by Birmingham's Vice-Chancellor Professor David Eastwood and Illinois' Chancellor Dr Phyllis Wise in Urbana-Champaign. The BRIDGE (BiRmingham-Illinois Partnership for Discovery EnGagement and Education) alliance sets out a framework based on collaborative research and teaching across a breadth of disciplines.

You can listen to Professor Eastwood and Dr Wise being interviewed about the strategic alliance, discussing what the hope to achieve as a result of the partnership, by clicking the link below.



The approach that the two universities have taken to forming the BRIDGE alliance is distinctive, since it builds on multiple strands of academic collaboration, some of which have been running for many years and others which have developed over the last four years. During this time, the universities courted each other and developed an understanding of how they work and how best to engage for mutual benefit. During this preliminary phase tens of universities staff, both from academic departments and professional services, moved in both directions to explore how collaboration might yield mutual advantage.

Benefits will be widespread for both institutions, not only as a result of increased global clout from joint research but also via the improved mobility and transatlantic opportunities for respective staff and student bodies. The signature alliance is also a statement for the growing global ambition of both the universities.

To date, engagement between the University of Birmingham and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign spans more than 25 established faculty-to-faculty links in 14 key academic disciplines. Both universities have established a pump-priming fund to capitalise on these collaborations and develop new initiatives in strategic areas. Research links between the two institutions include such disciplines as Economic and Physical Geography, Railway Engineering, Biomedical Engineering, Maths, Psychology, Environmental Genomics, Sport and Exercise Sciences, History of Art, American and Canadian Studies, Cultural Heritage and Education. The universities are also undertaking curriculum mapping to allow significant numbers of students to engage in semester exchange programmes and will be working together to develop other innovative study abroad programmes.

Speaking after the announcement, University of Birmingham Vice-Chancellor Professor David Eastwood said: "For more than four years we've been enabling our faculties to work together, to establish new areas of collaboration. Four years on, with those collaborations firmly embedded, we judged the time was right to sign a strategic alliance between our two universities.

"We hope to achieve research collaborations producing outstanding outputs, which we are already beginning to see. In a number of areas we have complementary expertise and that will give us, between the two universities, the critical mass to compete.

"We are certainly looking to see more faculty exchanges" and our students are excited about the possibility of studying at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign".

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Chancellor Dr Phyllis Wise added: "When you get to partner with a globally respected university, I think the faculty on both the Illinois side and on the British side benefit".

"All of the things that we are thinking about for the future of higher education don't know geographic or national borders and so this is a great partnership I look forward to growing".

Stephen Bridges, British Consul General in Chicago has praised the partnership: "I'd like to offer support and congratulations to University of Birmingham on the signing of their strategic alliance with the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign. It is illustrative of Birmingham's commitment to developing partnerships of academic and strategic excellence in the Midwest of the USA.

This agreement is just the latest example of their exemplary work here in this academically rich part of the US. Their perseverance has netted a relationship with one of the world's leading universities and we are confident it will result in successful results for both the University of Birmingham and the University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign".

Professor Eastwood and Dr Wise signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Tuesday 11 March at the Spurlock Museum, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

The signing of the BRIDGE alliance was preceded by a public talk given by Professor Eastwood on Monday 10 March at Illinois' Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology. Entitled Through a Glass Darkly: What the Future of Higher Education Might Be, the Vice-Chancellor described a challenging future ahead for universities worldwide, but one that embraces the new and is "every bit as central to the questing of the human spirit, and every bit as precious to sustaining all that's precious politically and culturally".

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