Hear from our alumni

A Chemistry degree from Birmingham can open the door to a multitude of career paths. Hear our alumni talk about their experiences of Birmingham and where they ended up after graduating.

Mike Hammond (BSc, Chemistry, 1992)

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Professor David Phillips, Imperial College London and President of Royal Society of Chemistry

'My days in Birmingham were long ago, but I have very fond memories of them.
I was conscious of having had a very good time socially and educationally, though perhaps Saturday morning practicals after Friday nights in the Guild Bar were not a highlight! One of the first tasks as a research student in 1961 was to move equipment into the brand new Haworth Building.

This was still in the hands of the contractor for the first year, so students were not allowed in after 8.00 pm. Because of the nature of our research, this was impractical, so many of us used to 'break into' the building in the evenings through a window left conveniently open.

Birmingham training has served me extremely well. Following my Ph.D in 1964, I travelled on a Fulbright Scholarship to the University of Texas as a post-doctoral fellow for two years, then more unusually, spent a year as a Royal Society/Academy of Sciences Exchange Fellow in the Institute of Chemical Physics, Moscow [then of course, the USSR, at the height of the 'Cold-War'].

1967 through 1980 saw me on the staff at the University of Southampton, and I moved from there to be Wolfson Professor of Natural Philosophy and Deputy Director of the Royal Institution, London, giving the RI BBC TV Christmas Lectures in 1987. Communicating science to the public, and especially to the young, has always been a priority in my life, and I was first inspired by the famed lectures given by Professor J.C.'Jimmy' Robb in Birmingham, one of my Ph.D supervisors.

In 1989 I moved to Imperial College London, being Head of Chemistry from 1992-2002, and Dean of Science 2002-2006. Although formally retired, I still have a laboratory and office in Imperial, and we run a company, PhotoBiotics, from Imperial also. In July this year I became President of the Royal Society of Chemistry, a great honour, and a position I certainly did not imagine coming my way in those enormously enjoyable days as a Birmingham chemistry student.'

Professor David Phillips, Imperial College London and current President of Royal Society of Chemistry.

Dr Stuart Cantrill, Chief Editor, Nature Chemistry

'I have very fond memories of my undergraduate days at Birmingham, and the quality of teaching there was outstanding. Life outside of the Haworth building was also a lot of fun – I played badminton for my Hall and many enjoyable hours were spent on the Bristol Road, partaking in the beer and baltis on offer...

I still make it back to the Sundarbon every now and then for a curry. I currently work at Nature Publishing Group in London, and I have recently been made chief editor of Nature Chemistry, although I've long been out of the lab, I still get to see a lot of cutting-edge research cross my desk in the form of manuscripts – and occasionally I get to write about it too.'

Dr Stuart Cantrill, Chief Editor, Nature Chemistry

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