OLD JOE

Alumni and friends magazine

Autumn 2023



The Birmingham graduate whose research could save a mother's life every 24 minutes

How to get published

The power of the arts to change the world

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

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View from the Vice-Chancellor: autumn 2023

I've had the privilege over the last year to meet with alumni around the world and see the huge difference you are making in your communities.

In May, I met with alumni and friends at a joyful event in London to celebrate our Birmingham In Action campaign. Since 2019, you have collectively made gifts totalling £366 million and volunteered nearly a million hours of your time to support students and life-changing research. To see the difference that philanthropy makes, read more about Lamyea Ahmed (who is supported by the Pathways to Birmingham programme) on page 12. I invite you to look at our website to see if there are ways you might be able to support our ground-breaking and life-changing campaign.

During June, I made my first visit to Hong Kong; nowhere else in the world has a group of alumni come together to form a foundation to support students and research, and I was proud to meet the alumni who helped create the Hong Kong Foundation. In addition to many scholarships, alumni are supporting research into microplastics in the region's rivers, improving the physical and mental health of schoolchildren and much more. Amongst the hundred guests, I met a (just) retired 82-year-old doctor, who gained his MBChB at Birmingham in the early 1960s, and heard from the impressive students supported to visit Hong Kong for a month to learn about leadership and understand the rhythms of a different society.

Travelling then to China, I was pleased to be part of the first in-person degree ceremony for students who have studied a dual degree maths programme with Birmingham and Jinan University. Although this is the third cohort of graduates, because of COVID-19 it is the first time that we've been able to celebrate the graduations in-person. A little bit of the Great Hall came to Guangzhou in a spectacular ceremony for 180 of this year's graduates. I was pleased to be able to meet them and their family and friends to share in their joy at their achievements.

In September, I visited the US to celebrate the end of the US wide tour of the Shakespeare Institute's Moroccan Ambassador portrait. The painting's journey has been shared with alumni from New York to San Francisco via Cincinnati and I was delighted to meet supporters and friends at the tour's final stop; the Legion of Honor. I am always struck by the creativity and entrepreneurial fervour of our students and it was wonderful to meet alumni who continue to share that Birmingham spirit and drive to support future generations.

> **"It was wonderful to meet alumni who continue to share that Birmingham spirit and drive to support future generations."**
>
> *Professor Adam Tickell*

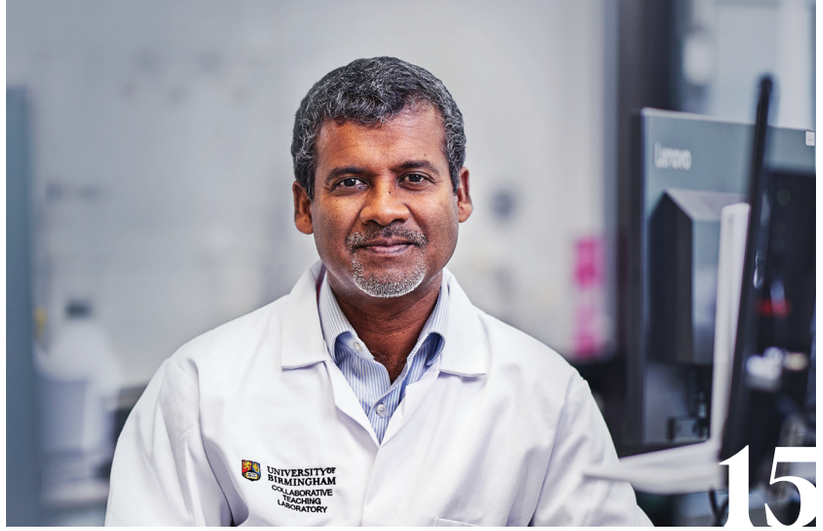
I was delighted to host Honorary Visiting Professor, General David Petraeus and senior alumni and friends for dinner in Washington DC, where we discussed the valuable role of international diplomacy in addressing global challenges.

It means so much to meet with alumni, to hear what matters to you about Birmingham and what you want to see in our future. As the guardian of your alma mater, I want to ensure the University of Birmingham works for everyone.

Thank you for having me!



Professor Adam Tickell
Vice-Chancellor and Principal



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In this edition



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If you have difficulties reading any part of this magazine, please visit our website or request a plain text version.

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The articles in *Old Joe* are accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of print. However, things continue to change. To see whether there have been any updates, visit:

oldjoe.co.uk

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Old Joe news

All the latest news from the University, from cutting-edge research to sporting successes.



Abdulbari Belouafi and Ibrahim Albaik

Making water out of air

A University start-up is developing a first of its kind atmospheric water harvester to help address the global water shortage.

NovNat Tech was founded by Birmingham graduates Abdulbari Belouafi (PGDip Advanced Mechanical Engineering, 2019) and Ibrahim Albaik (MSc Advanced Mechanical Engineering, 2019; PhD Mechanical Engineering, 2022) and is based at the Edgbaston campus.

The technology uses a patented material to capture and release water from air more efficiently than any existing material.

The start-up is supported by the University's entrepreneurship programme, UoB Elevate, and funding from Innovate UK will support the development of an onboard vehicle atmospheric water generator to produce clean water on the go.





Revealing secrets from the birth of the universe

Birmingham astronomers were among a team of European scientists to discover evidence of elusive low frequency gravitational waves after studying data collected over two decades.

The discovery builds on the Nobel Prize-winning work previously conducted by international scientists, including researchers from Birmingham, which first detected gravitational waves in 2015.

Ultra-low frequency gravitational waves could reveal the best-kept secrets of the Universe, including the formation of binary systems of supermassive black holes at the heart of distant galaxies — events that may have taken place when the Universe was just a few seconds old.

Scientists have been searching for these signals using six of the world's most powerful radio telescopes, which monitor radio signals from rotating neutron stars, called pulsars.

The results may be the first direct evidence of giant black holes distorting space and time as they spiral in on each other.



Improving detection of early-stage ovarian cancer

A £2 million study is using an advanced test at GP surgeries in the West Midlands to diagnose early-stage ovarian cancer and potentially save thousands of lives a year.

Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust and Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust have paired up with the University of Birmingham and primary care provider Modality to offer a blood test to patients experiencing symptoms of the disease such as bloating or stomach pain.

While patients with persistent or severe symptoms are already offered an existing blood test (CA-125), the new ROMA test used during the trial will identify key markers of the disease at an earlier stage.

The SONATA (tranSforming Ovarian caNcer diAgnostic paThwAys) study is being led by University Professor Sudha Sundar. Researchers will analyse whether the ROMA test has a higher chance of detecting ovarian cancer than the current CA-125 test and whether it would be cost effective to introduce across the NHS.



New mission for mental health research

The University of Birmingham is leading the development of radical new treatments for mental health conditions, thanks to major government investment.

£9.9 million is being provided to establish the Midlands Translational Research Centre of Excellence, co-led by the University with Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust (BWC NHS) and Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Building on support from the Wolfson Foundation, research will focus on improving the speed and accuracy of diagnosis, increasing the use of new technologies and establishing new treatment approaches.

Rachel Upthegrove (MPhil Psychiatry, 2001; PhD Psychiatry, 2011), Professor of Psychiatry and Youth Mental Health at the University of Birmingham and Mental Health Research and Development Lead at BWC NHS, says: 'We're delighted that the government is making such a significant investment in mental health research. Focusing on young, superdiverse, and deprived populations, we will engage with funders and industry partners to develop and deliver precision interventions for mental health disorders including psychosis and depression.'

The alumni making health breakthroughs at Birmingham

University Professors and alumni Robin May (PhD Biochemistry, 2001) and Liam Grover (BMedSci Biomedical Materials Science, 2001; PhD Dentistry, 2004) have been elected to the prestigious Academy of Medical Sciences. They have been recognised for their contributions to the advancement of biomedical and health science, with cutting edge discoveries and translating developments into benefits for patients and wider society.

Robin is a Professor of Infectious Disease in the School of Biosciences and investigates how pathogens survive and replicate within host organisms.

Liam is a Professor of Biomaterials Science in the School of Chemical Engineering and designs materials that enhance the regeneration of damaged and diseased tissues.



Baroness Valerie Amos at the coronation of King Charles III.

Graduates at the coronation

Keen-eyed viewers of the coronation of King Charles III will have seen two Birmingham graduates who had distinguished roles to play in the ceremony.

Baroness Valerie Amos LG participated in the act of Recognition of His Majesty alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, while the Rt Reverend Rose Hudson Wilkin CD, The Bishop of Dover, presented The Queen Consort's Rod to Her Majesty The Queen Consort.

On presenting regalia to Her Majesty, The Bishop of Dover says: 'I was surprised, excited and honoured to have been asked to play a part in this historic once in a lifetime occasion.'



Former Chair of the Hong Kong Foundation, Dr Ir Conrad Wong.

Celebrating the Hong Kong Foundation

Alumni and supporters of the University gathered in Hong Kong this summer to recognise the contributions and professional achievements of Dr Ir Conrad Wong (MSc [Eng] Foundation Engineering, 1988).

Conrad was awarded the University's prestigious Hong Kong Medal by Vice-Chancellor Professor Adam Tickell as the culmination of his two-year spell as Chair of the University of Birmingham Hong Kong Foundation.

Guests heard about key research projects taking place in the region thanks to funding from the Foundation, from assessing microplastic pollution in the Pearl River Delta to empowering young people in Hong Kong. Dr Guy Look (BCom Industrial Economics and Business Studies, 1979; DUniv 2013) was also welcomed to the position of Chair.

IBSA World Games

Spectators from around the world attended ten spectacular days of sport in Birmingham as the University's Edgbaston campus hosted the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) World Games 2023.

The archery, blind football, chess, judo and showdown events all took place at the University. As the largest high-level international event for athletes with visual impairments apart from the Paralympics, the Games saw 2,000 competitors from more than 70 nations taking part.

Year in pictures

Ink it in

Alumna Lemady Rochard (BA Drama and Theatre Arts, 2003) has been shortlisted for the Children's Publishing — New Talent 2023 category for the 2023 World Illustration Awards. Lemady is an artist, illustrator, storyteller and teacher based in Switzerland, and was nominated for work printed in *Cricket* magazine.



Credit: www.lemady.ch

Vision for a better future

Congratulations to Sarah Hughes (BPhil Teaching Visually Impaired [Distance Ed and Part Time], 2010), who has received the award for Leadership in Promoting Vision Impairment Education at the UK Professional Association for the Vision Impairment Workforce awards. She leads the SenCom Vision Impairment Service in Gwent and received her award from Paralympian cyclist James Ball.



In the details

A stunning piece of art by alumna Lucy Walker (MSc Chemistry, 2022) will have pride of place in the new Molecular Sciences building on Edgbaston campus when it opens in 2024. Created via Photoshop over the course of six months, the artwork is actually made up of molecules researched by groups within the School of Chemistry.



Image credit: Instagram @_moleculearts, Twitter @moleculearts_, Etsy Moleculearts

Birmingham goes global

Alumni in Abuja were among more than 300 alumni worldwide to celebrate the 2023 Global Alumni Gatherings. Alumni met in May and June in 30 locations ranging from Azerbaijan to Washington DC.



Honouring our sporting finest

21 alumni and supporters of the University from the world of sport were honoured in September for the inauguration of the UB Sport Hall of Fame. The group included Olympic and Paralympic medal winners, elite coaches and club or organisation administrators.





The heart of mentoring: Cox's Crew

Mentoring can positively impact two lives; the student's and the mentor's. Sarah Cox (BCom, 1988, pictured centre with mentees) has mentored 11 students since starting in 2012, and created a mutually supportive network of her current and past mentees, nicknamed 'Cox's Crew'. She explains her passion for the University of Birmingham and what she gains from being a mentor.

Family ties to Birmingham

'The University of Birmingham has always been important to me. My parents met studying medicine at Birmingham; I remember them driving me across campus when I was about eight years old and deciding I wanted to study here too. My mother believed in the value of education and was a real trailblazer – the first in her family to go to University, she fought to get into the boys' school to do science A levels as they weren't allowed to do them at the girls' grammar she attended. My brothers also graduated from Birmingham, as well as my nephew, so it's a really important place to multiple generations of my family.'

How to get to the top

'As a no-nonsense northerner, I've somehow always managed to cut through at a senior level and get my point across. It's been really interesting working in the Civil Service with five different Prime Ministers, getting their take on what really happens in the country and how it really operates. I've also led projects that have given me the inside view of the Olympics, and worked at the Bank of England, Ofgem and CGI, giving me key experience that the next generation can benefit from.'

What mentoring means to me

'I've always done quite a bit of mentoring in the workplace, and I think it's important to give of yourself, and pass on your experiences to the next generation. All my mentees have been so different; I always give them homework on the first meeting by asking them what they enjoy and what they don't. I really try to build up a picture of that person and their individual style.

'I see my role as encouraging the mentees to have confidence, find opportunities and think through their own solutions to problems. They live in a different world to the one I graduated into and so it makes me think about myself too. You are very driven when you are that age, and it helps me to get that mojo back. When you are a mentor you gain a lot more back in return.'

Taking mentoring a step further: Cox's Crew

'While I've done my best to support each of my mentees, I also realised how much they could learn from each other too, as we all work in similar areas. You have a different perspective and experience depending on whether you graduated 11 years ago or two years ago. We are all connected on a WhatsApp group called 'Cox's Crew'; it's a friendship group and a networking space, that enables their careers to accelerate forwards. It means they can get instant advice on time-sensitive issues and shows that while they are still learning in some areas, they already have so much to give back in others.'

Looking to the future

'I had such a good time here and I met some great people. It's such an important time – you really grow up when you are at University. I really admire the values at Birmingham and found out more about their schemes to support less advantaged students. It prompted me to pledge something in my will to the medical school – my mum fought so hard against the odds to study medicine, I felt the gift would honour her and my whole family. I think it's what Mum and Dad would have wanted.'

You can find out more about leaving a gift in your will, like Sarah has, by visiting **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-Leave-A-Gift**

Learn about how you can become a mentor on our new mentoring platform – see the back page for full details.



Joe Taylor

Joe's journey

Mentee Joe Taylor (BA Sociology, 2015) says: 'Whilst at University and taking our first proper steps into the big wide world of work, having a mentor to provide guidance is invaluable. During my career I find that there are periods where I lean into my mentorship with Sarah more; for example, changing jobs or dealing with a particularly challenging situation. Sarah has actively created a community whereby we can not only benefit from her experience and perspective but benefit from others as well. She connects us through her awareness of us individually, so that we can build relationships.'

> **"Sarah has actively created a community whereby we can not only benefit from her experience and perspective but benefit from others as well."**

Why are we stuck in hospital?

Right now, around 2,000 people in England with learning disabilities and/or autistic people are living in 'long-stay' secure hospitals, often for many years and with no planned date for them to leave - despite repeated policies meant to help them live in the community. Researchers at Birmingham, led by Professor of Health and Social Care Jon Glasby, are asking what we can do to help them leave hospital and lead more ordinary lives...

Stuck in the system

Two years: that is the average time some people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people spend with their lives on hold in hospitals and inpatient units; and a few up to ten years. This is despite policy and press attention over recent care abuse scandals bringing these settings into the spotlight.

Services are struggling to prevent people reaching crisis point in the first place, and to adequately support them in units a long way from friends and families. Despite the cost and inadequacies of the services, there has been surprisingly little research on why people get stuck in such settings, and little public awareness of the issue.

> **"I feel like I'm going round and round in circles... [You] get so far then hit a barrier."**

Person in hospital quoted in report

Why isn't this getting fixed? A report with a difference...

Jon's research team is working with the rights-based organisation Changing our Lives, finding out what the main barriers are, and what would genuinely help people to leave hospital. He explains: 'Previous research has often failed to talk directly to people with learning disabilities and/or autistic people, their families and frontline staff about their experiences of living or working in such settings, what they see as the main barriers and what would help more people to leave hospital. For us, failing to take into account their lived experience was not only morally wrong, but is wasting a major source of expertise with which to improve services.'

Jon believes we already have the answers at our fingertips: 'People in long-stay hospitals know what kind of life they want to lead; they know that no one should "live" in a hospital and they often know what would help them leave – the problem is that not enough people seem to be listening.'

> **"The problem is that not enough people seem to be listening."**

Professor Jon Glasby

Helping to transform services

The report captured experiences to create 'ten top tips' that have been shared with every health and social care leader in the country, including a free training video for care staff and an accessible version for people with learning disabilities. The topic will be looked at further through IMPACT, the new UK centre for implementing evidence in adult social care.

The University of Birmingham is the lead partner for IMPACT, funded by a £15 million ESRC and Health Foundation grant and drawing on insights from research, lived experience, and practice knowledge to make a difference to front-line services, and to people's lives.



How to help

People's tips for helping them to leave hospital.



Our lives are on hold - do your jobs and get some 'oomph'



See the person behind the labels



Don't make me jump through more hoops than is really needed



Give me the chance to try life outside

See more tips online at **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/stuck-in-hospital**

The street artist amplifying patients' voices

The research found an unexpected ally in Birmingham-based artist, Foka Wolf, best known for his 'subvertisements'; parodies of corporate and political posters.

He lent his skills to bring to life the frustration and loneliness people feel, creating an art installation of an impossible maze filled with the words of those stuck in hospital: 'I'm so far away from my mum.'

'When I was told some of the stories about people trapped in social care I was gobsmacked,' says Foka on his involvement with the project.

'I felt naive for not knowing about any of this. The exhibition is less about the art and more about the message... and this is the perfect opportunity to tell people about it.'



Foka Wolf, 'Why are we stuck in hospital' exhibition at the IKON Gallery in Birmingham.

Read the report in full and watch a video with Birmingham artist and activist Foka Wolf by scanning the QR code or visit **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/stuck-in-hospital-report**

BIRMINGHAM ACTION

Launched in 2019, Birmingham In Action brings together charitable projects from across the University, to tackle challenges facing this generation and the next. Four years on, so many alumni and friends have taken action on causes close to their hearts.

A huge thank you to:

- **More than 10,000 alumni and friends** across 70 countries, who have made gifts to support life-changing scholarships and research breakthroughs
- **Nearly 7,000 volunteers,** who have given guest lectures, gathered key research data and mentored more than 4,000 students and recent graduates



How you helped Lamyea's dreams take flight

Aerospace Engineering student Lamyea Ahmed is supported by the Pathways to Birmingham (P2B) programme, which is mostly funded by donors.

'I fell in love with the idea of being a pilot. When I discovered my eyesight wasn't good enough, I thought, why don't I design the aeroplane instead?

'My parents had to move house part way through my A levels and my new teachers didn't know my capabilities. I remember feeling that perhaps I can't go to university and aerospace engineering may be too big a dream.

'My excitement was reinvigorated when I learnt of P2B. The workshops and online tutoring calmed my doubts.

'P2B meant I could buy a laptop that was able to run the complex software needed for aerospace engineering, and helped me pay for accommodation over the summer, so I could take up an amazing internship.

'I also met many alumni and mentors through P2B, who gave me tips and tricks to acing interviews and navigating university life. I will definitely volunteer as a mentor myself.

'This is a truly life-changing programme.'

> **"I will definitely volunteer as a mentor myself. This is a truly life-changing programme."**
>
> *Lamyea Ahmed*

The five themes...

and ways you are making a difference



- Over 1,000 Pathways to Birmingham scholarships
- Alumni mentors for 4,000 students/recent graduates
- Over 50 Masters and PhD students funded
- Grants by the Alumni Impact Fund to support projects by students, groups and sports clubs



- A sci-fi lab in a forest, which can see the future of climate change — plus learning kits for schools
- 125 alumni volunteers are helping prevent wildfires
- Helping identify pollution in rivers around Guangzhou, the Himalayas and Hong Kong



- Cancer breakthroughs, from better tests to improving survival rates
- Reducing the number of women bleeding heavily in childbirth by 60% — see page 15
- Finding new ways to treat infectious diseases



- Support for students recovering from addiction
- Providing Sanctuary Scholarships to those who need them most
- Supporting those students caught up in the cost-of-living crisis



- Giving STEM students the skills to improve our world, from solar power to engineering medicines
- Helping young entrepreneurs get started
- Improving clean energy, from large-scale electric vehicle charging to cheaper heating for homes

See how you can support this life-changing work, taking action together for students, our health, the environment and so much more, at **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-bia-A23**

BIRMINGHAM ACTION

The Birmingham research that could save a mother's life *every 24 minutes*



Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) is the leading cause of maternal mortality worldwide, leaving children without mothers — but with the right knowledge, it is treatable.

A ground-breaking new trial, developed, implemented and published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* by Professor of Gynaecology and Reproductive Medicine Arri Coomarasamy (MBChB Medicine, 1995; MD Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 2004) has delivered a 60% reduction in the number of women bleeding heavily during childbirth.

He says: 'Our new approach to treating postpartum haemorrhage could radically improve women's chances of surviving childbirth globally, helping them get the treatment they need, when they need it.

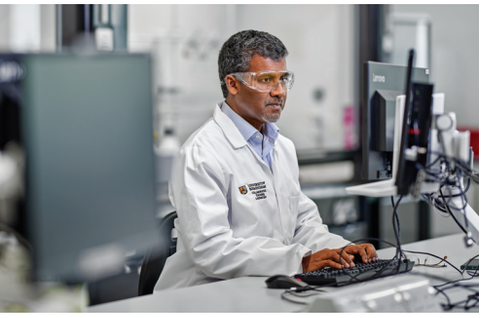
'Time is of the essence when responding to postpartum bleeding, so eliminating delays in diagnosis or treatment should make a huge difference and our clinical trial has shown that it does.'

> **"Our new approach to treating postpartum haemorrhage could radically improve women's chances of surviving childbirth globally."**
>
> *Professor Arri Coomarasamy*

Continued...

The challenge

Arri and his team identified three key challenges in responding to postpartum haemorrhage:



1. PPH is often detected too late to be treated effectively. The standard visual inspection of swabs and bed linen to assess bleeding was found to underestimate bloodloss massively, leading to life-threatening delays in treatment.

2. Even once the problem was picked up the **treatment wasn't happening quickly enough**. Time is the biggest killer in a condition that involves bleeding.

3. Patients tend to respond differently to different treatments – what works for one mother, doesn't work for another. Treatments were being provided one by one with gaps in between, costing valuable time if the first options were not effective.

The solution: a drape and bundle of treatments

The trial found drastic improvements in outcomes by combining accurate measurement of blood loss with a bundle of PPH treatments.

1. A simple low cost plastic 'drape' was developed to measure blood loss more effectively; placed under the mother during birth, it collects all the blood to instantly show when bleeding becomes more serious.

2. Treatments including uterine massage, medicines to contract the womb to stop the bleeding and intravenous fluid administration were delivered all at once, instead of being offered sequentially.

This resulted in the birth of E-MOTIVE - 'E' is early detection using the drape measuring method and 'MOTIVE' is the bundle of treatment.

The E-MOTIVE trial took place over two years in four low and middle income countries, involving over 200,000 women across 80 secondary level health facilities. It was successful in reducing treatment delays for women who lost one litre of blood or more by 60%. It worked in every participating country, and throughout the trial participating hospitals continually improved their treatment and outcomes.



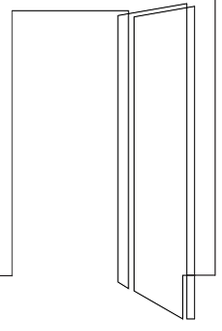
E-MOTIVE in action in Tanzania.

A life-changing moment

Arri has known the stats since he was a student himself at Birmingham: the high number of deaths in childbirth and that deaths were higher in specific countries.

But the life-changing moment, when Arri made it his mission to make a difference, came when he asked what was behind an unmarked door in a delivery suite.

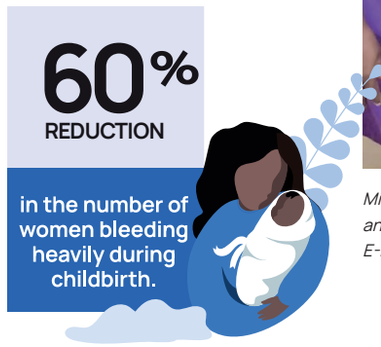
Go online to **oldjoe.co.uk** to hear him talk about this significant moment.



Before and after: the view from the maternity ward

Thea Williams is a Maternity Ward Manager in Vrendenburg Hospital in South Africa. She says: 'The E-MOTIVE trial has made a huge difference to us. Now PPH diagnosis can be made by a midwife and we have a much more accurate blood loss estimation.

'As midwives, we now have much more confidence to manage the situation and we can act much quicker. The bundle has benefitted so many women, for whom the outcome could have been much more serious if we hadn't been using it.'





Midwife Zino Oneyeyone with a mother and baby in Nigeria who were helped by E-MOTIVE.

What's next?

The World Health Organization (WHO) is now revising its recommendations. Arri estimates that once it is scaled up, E-MOTIVE could save a life every 24 minutes.

Arri, in recognition of this life-saving research and his role as the Founding Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Global Women's Health, as well as for his directorship of the Tommy's National Centre for Miscarriage Research, has recently been awarded an OBE.

While the E-MOTIVE trial itself was generously funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *alumni support was crucial in enabling the preliminary research that paved the way.* Arri says: 'Without the initial support of philanthropic donations from alumni, we couldn't have proved the impact of our early work and might never have been noticed by a major funder like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

'The foresight and belief of supporters at Birmingham got this life-changing work off the ground, and there are so many women alive today because of alumni's generosity.'

Bill Gates
@BillGates

I'm very encouraged by the E-MOTIVE Trial results released today at #IMNHC2023 to treat postpartum hemorrhage, the #1 cause of maternal mortality. This new approach led by @unibirmingham and @WHO could drastically improve women's chances of surviving childbirth globally. b-gat.es/3BclMsw

9:21 PM · May 9, 2023 · **538.9K** Views

1 · 349 · 1,355 · 14

Could you facilitate the world's next life-saving treatment?

Get in touch if you are interested in supporting our global health research, including maternal health, cancer treatments and solutions to antibiotic resistance: **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-global-health-A23**

Reasons to be proud
of your University

Birmingham ranked 84th in the world

Birmingham has risen seven places to become the 84th top ranked University globally, in the 2023 QS World University Rankings. All five faculty areas improved their standing, giving the University a total of 22 Top 100 subjects.

62 **Life Sciences and Medicine**
rose 31 places to 62.

65 **Arts and Humanities**
placed at 65 – a rise of 12 places.

TOP 50 **Sport, Dentistry, English, Theology, Anatomy and Physiology, and Linguistics**
all improved their standing in the Top 50. Sport rose one place to 6th position and Dentistry rose two places to 22nd.

TOP 100 **Pharmacy, Materials Science and Politics**
moved into the Top 100.

In addition, Birmingham graduates are the third most sought after by top employers (2023 *High Fliers* report), and five subjects at Birmingham were ranked in the UK's top ten by the Complete University Guide: Physiotherapy; Creative Writing; Tourism, Transport, Travel & Heritage Studies; Physics and Astronomy; and Social Policy.

Read more about the QS World University Rankings at
uob.oldjoe.co.uk/news-A23-QS-rankings

Free legal advice for those in need

Many of those who need legal advice urgently are the least able to afford it; from people fleeing abusive relationships, to those affected by environmental disasters.

Law students have provided hundreds of hours of free legal advice this year. These projects have supported victims of fraud, people with learning disabilities, people wrongfully convicted, environmental campaigners and a local women's refuge, with advice on everything from rights in hospital to housing.

The work helps students understand the emotional and ethical elements of the law, and the programme continues to expand to further support entrepreneurs, including start-ups, micro-enterprises and community organisations doing arts, faith and youth work.



Law students working on pro bono cases at Birmingham.

Helping governments mitigate climate change

Birmingham's environmental researchers are advising how to mitigate and adapt to climate change at COP28, the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference in November.

Birmingham's Dubai campus is hosting a range of events around the conference.

Climate change is already affecting everything from our health to our food. Birmingham's recommendations include:

- A plan for dealing with pollution from tyres and brakes
- E-bikes have the potential to be even better for our environment than electric vehicles
- Better early warning systems for flooding
- Fuel our trains with green hydrogen instead of diesel
- Do not overspecialise in crop varieties, to reduce the risks and impact of climate-induced crop failure

Read more at: **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/A23-cop28**





BTW Project Manager Luke Trainor (left) with one of the students in recovery, visiting the birthplace of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The first university-led student recovery programme in Europe

University life can present a variety of challenges to recovery from addiction to drugs, alcohol or behaviours such as gambling. Better Than Well (BTW), Birmingham's addiction recovery programme, offers everything from sober social events to a 'recovery flat', where students with different addictions live together and support each other.

While around 150 American universities have something like this, this is the first university-led programme in Europe. Supported by a philanthropic gift and the University, BTW supports around 50 students, focusing on positive recovery and wellbeing.

One student says: 'BTW welcomed me into their group with no judgement. That compassion keeps me sober.

'Now I get to have more in my life than just simply managing.'

Read more student stories of recovery at:
uob.oldjoe.co.uk/A23-student-recovery

See more ways your University is helping people in need and making the world better at
uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-bia-proud

Pop culture for social change

Can star power be transformed into social impact? Comic Relief talent lead Luke Harris (BA English and Drama, 2011) explores the importance of pop culture in bringing about social change, as recently shared in Birmingham's inaugural Arts Matters Lecture.

Famously the brainchild of script writer and producer Richard Curtis and comedian Lenny Henry with charity worker Jane Tewson in response to the famine in Ethiopia, Comic Relief has become a cornerstone of British television and entertainment culture. Anyone who is anyone in showbiz has worked with Comic Relief, from Judi Dench to French and Saunders, Rowan Atkinson to Andy Murray, to drive positive change through the power of entertainment.

Why are the arts so successful in tackling poverty and injustice?

The arts help reach a huge audience through a perfect balance of substance and silliness.

Luke says: 'Comedy and popular culture have the power to bring people together. Comic Relief's sweet spot will always be doing this in a way that engages and sparks emotion. We stir the heart and inspire the belief in a better future for all.'

Comically large noses, incongruous cameos and a healthy amount of innuendo and witty wordplay help draw attention to difficult issues, including famine, domestic violence, homelessness and addiction.



Luke Harris

Luke says: 'Popular culture is just that – popular. We believe in making change happen by working with others, with wide appeal.'

> "If you give people the chance to be generous and kind, they usually will."

How do you get celebrities to agree to be involved?

Luke's favourite motto is: 'If you don't ask, you don't get'. Charming cheekiness is an important ingredient, and if in doubt, Luke asks Richard Curtis (award winning screenwriter of films from *Four Weddings and a Funeral* to *Love Actually*) to send the email!

Perhaps the real genius of Comic Relief is that it has created a safe, fun and heart-warming place for people's generosity to go. Comic Relief creates silliness that is kind, never cruel. Luke stresses that comedy is never created at the expense of someone; all celebrity cameos are carefully created to appeal to their humour, their funny side, but within their comfort zone.

Can pop culture change the world?

Pop culture demonstrates its power to create social and political change by gently encouraging the public to assess their perception.

The 2017 'Riding the Waves' report, written by Alice Sachrajda and Esme Peach for Unbound Philanthropy, found that: 'Culture moves issues into the mainstream and provokes us to think about how we view the world. It may not write the legislation, but culture can create the conditions for political change to become inevitable.'

There are countless examples of this throughout the British zeitgeist, from *EastEnders*' HIV storyline to *Planet Earth*'s focus on climate change. Luke says: 'If you give people the chance to be generous and kind, they usually will. And that kindness is a ripple effect that can create so much good in the world.'



Mike Smith, Stephen Fry, Robbie Coltrane, Dawn French, Harry Enfield, Hugh Laurie and Lenny Henry on the set of the first 'Red Nose Day' in 1988.

Why the arts matter just as much as the sciences

Speaking to alumni and guests at the inaugural Arts Matters Lecture, Luke said: 'The title of this lecture series is a really important one, especially at a time when we've seen the value of the arts debated and, in my opinion, severely underfunded and under-prioritised. The UK is a phenomenal leader of the arts with some of the finest, bravest and boldest talent.

'We should be doing everything we can to unleash and unlock this potential. It's something that needs to be nurtured, taught and encouraged. While STEM graduates may be the ones to develop cures for cancer, it will be arts graduates that give us so much joy and meaning in our lives. Art lifts us up; we would be nothing without the arts.'

The impact of a Birmingham arts degree

Luke credits his arts degree for a whole range of skills that he uses every day, from his ability to think creatively and communicate fluidly, to being perceptive and astute to challenges that arise and assessing and adapting projects accordingly.

His University of Birmingham education has led him to a fulfilling and challenging job that has taken him all over the world and equipped him with dinner party anecdotes for life – including meeting Dame Judi Dench and putting sun cream on Nick Grimshaw's legs.



Nick Grimshaw (TV and radio presenter) and Rob Rinder (ITV's Judge Rinder) during their gruelling 100-mile expedition across the Namib Desert in aid of Sport Relief in 2020.

Join the next Arts Matters lecture series and other fascinating lectures, seminars and workshops on subjects ranging from History and Anthropology to Film and Philosophy. See Birmingham's arts events listings at **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-artslaw-events**

Campus romances



Geoff Uren (BDS Dentistry, 1962) and Janet Uren (Nursing, 1963)

Janet says: 'We met at a Saturday night hop at the Guild of Students in 1960. In those days there was always a live band and it was a shilling a ticket. I remember running down the main stairs to get back to the nurses' accommodation by midnight and avoid being seen by the matron.

'We were married in 1963. Geoff was a dentist and orthodontist until his retirement, setting up his own practice in Stourport. I later retrained as a primary school teacher, having been inspired by my time volunteering with the Women's Royal Voluntary Society throughout the 1970s.

> "We met at a Saturday night hop at the Guild of Students in 1960."
>
> *Janet Uren*

'We remained in the West Midlands and have two children, four grandchildren including Birmingham graduate Bryony [see the next story], and two great-grandchildren.'



Bryony Allison (BA History and North American Studies, 2018) and Matthew Allison (MSc Geology, 2019)

Bryony says: 'I met my husband Matt in the same building as my grandparents [the Guild of Students] at a Guild Musical Theatre Group rehearsal in 2014. Just as we started to get to know each other, Matt suffered a serious head injury and had to take some time out of University.

'We were reunited in 2015 and became an item shortly after. I worked out that the reason Matt was building all the sets for the show I was choreographing and was always in the front row of my tap rehearsals was because he was interested in me, not the show!

> "I met my husband Matt in the same building where my grandparents met."
>
> *Bryony Allison*

'We married in June 2023 and live in Birmingham with our rescue dog Zoe. Matt has remained at the University studying for a PhD in Geology. After a career in arts marketing, I have returned to the much-loved Edgbaston campus as well and am now working in the Development and Alumni Relations Office.'



Linda Moore (BSc Mathematics and Geography, 1980) and Julian Moore (BSc Biological Sciences and Geography, 1980)

Julian says: 'We first met over breakfast in 1978, in one of the halls of residence of Montpellier University during a Geography field trip. As luck would have it, when we returned to Birmingham, we discovered that we lived just yards from each other in Maple Bank.

'After meeting up with each other virtually every day over the next two years, we completed PGCEs at Leicester University and got married in 1981, after which we settled down in Derbyshire and had two children. When our daughter Lucy came to study at the University, we visited some of our old haunts; the Physics bridge, High Hall during its demolition and, most poignantly, the small memorial in remembrance of Catherine Mitchell and John Kolpinski who we knew from our shared courses. We both retired from teaching in 2015.'



Hannah Fryman (BA History of Art, 2018) and Ellie Jamieson (MSc Geology, 2019)

Hannah says: 'We met in 2015 through some mutual friends. I was a History of Art student and Ellie was a Geology student. Our favourite memories include sports nights at the Guild, art talks at the Barber Institute and revising together for finals at our chosen spot we called the "big table of love" with our pals on floor one of the new library.

'Since then, we have moved to London, where I am a primary school teacher and Ellie is back as a student, studying medicine at St George's Hospital. We still see many of our university friends and have fond memories of our time there.'



Did you meet your significant other at Birmingham?

We'd love to hear your story and want to include as many diverse stories as possible, including alumni in our LGBTQ+ community. Send yours to: **alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk** and find more stories of love online at **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/A23-campus-romance**

Get married on campus with an exclusive alumni discount

You could tie the knot on campus at the University's Edgbaston Park Hotel, only a few minutes' walk away from Old Joe. Edgbaston Park Hotel is offering Birmingham alumni an exclusive 10% off their standard wedding package or room hire costs. Visit **www.edgbastonparkhotel.com/weddings/alumni-weddings** to find out more.



Flourish in your workplace

The importance of looking after your mental health at home and at work has never been clearer. Two University of Birmingham graduates, whose start-up business promotes good practice in the workplace, share their tips for both employers and employees.

Bloomwise was created to provide proactive mental health support to people at work by current PhD researcher Frankie Lewns (BMedSc Biomedical Materials Science, 2019) and Dr Paris Lalousis (MSc Brain Imaging and Cognitive Neuroscience, 2017).

Bloomwise helps employers support their team's mental health in three ways: an in-depth Mental Health Plan; workshops to educate and empower people to feel confident when looking after and talking about their own wellbeing; and a mental health app that benefits both employers and their employees.

Personal stakes

Paris and Frankie have their own experiences with mental health. Paris was diagnosed with panic disorder at the age of 14 and adds: 'Now I work in the field, I have always tried to destigmatise the way people talk about mental health by being open about my personal circumstances.'

Frankie says: 'I have had more friends and family members experience poor mental health than not, and have also been in a workplace where I felt there were little to no initiatives, so the issue struck a chord with us as a topic we are both passionate about.'

Paying forward the support to get started

Bloomwise was further developed as part of the UoB Elevate programme for start-ups, receiving funding to create the workplace app. Frankie and Paris are now returning the favour by offering their perspective and guidance to those thinking of setting up their own business.

Bright minds: the interns who became part of the Bloomwise family

Bloomwise took on two interns through the University of Birmingham Start-Up Scholarship, a programme funded by alumni donations.

Saba Shahzad (BSc Business Management, 2023) and Millie Cullis (BSc Psychology, 2023) helped create the mental health workshops so successfully that they both returned to the company to deliver the workshops as full members of the team.

Frankie adds: 'The interns were absolutely amazing in creating an entire product for us that is currently our biggest revenue generator, and for which we get terrific feedback from those it is helping in their workplace.'

Such was the success of the scholars that Bloomwise took on another three new interns through the scheme. Paris says: 'We highly recommend getting University students working for your business. The pool of candidates is outstanding, they're all highly motivated and the level of work they provide exceeds expectations. It's an amazing resource.'

> **"I have always tried to destigmatise the way people talk about mental health by being open about my personal circumstances."**
>
> *Dr Paris Lalousis*



Frankie Lewns and Dr Paris Lalousis, co-founders of Bloomwise.

Bloomwise's tips for employers



1. **Lead by example.** Use the right language, provide an inclusive environment, and share your own experiences that you've had with mental health. A culture of openness will give others the confidence and freedom to talk and act upon their experiences.
2. **Emphasise the co-creation of mental health initiatives.** Don't introduce ideas without consulting with your team, or create focus groups if it's a very large organisation. The interventions and initiatives that are co-created are the ones that are the most successful.
3. **Keep it dynamic**. Whatever you create can't just sit still for years. Keep thinking about what changes can be made that fit into the way the world is operating.

Bloomwise's tips for employees

In the workplace, initiatives should be led by management. It's the responsibility of the workplace to provide those things. However, individuals can still help themselves:





1. **Self-monitor**, e.g. by creating a journal. Our mental health is affected by many factors, and these will be different for your work and for your life at home. Self-monitoring on a regular basis gives a lot of insight into our own wellbeing.
2. **Take regular breaks**. It seems simple, but too many people do not do it. If it's not a habit, then schedule 10-minute blocks into your diary, or set alarms on your phone. Move away from your screen and ground yourself in the present moment while you make a drink or stretch your legs.
3. **If you spend any time working from home, ensure that there is complete separation between your work life and your personal life.** Ideally create a dedicated area for work (so not your kitchen table). If you cannot do that, then at the end of the work day shut down your laptop and get it away from your sight. Dress as if you are going to work and when you finish for the day, take a walk to clear your mind.

If you would like to support student or graduate entrepreneurs, you can share your expertise as a mentor or support a scholarship.

Email **giving@contacts.bham.ac.uk** to get a conversation started.



Professor Susanne Gatz

Supporting the next generation of bright minds in cancer research

Only around 2% of cancer research funding in the UK is spent on research that is fully dedicated to childhood and young adult cancer. Although cases are rare, the brightest young researchers are needed to find kinder, more effective and personalised treatments. Charities, kind-hearted donors and families who have experienced the heartbreak of losing a loved one are working with pioneering student researchers to help this take place.

The Professor's view: what PhD students make possible

For Associate Professor Susanne Gatz, PhD students and researchers are at the heart of any lab. Her team includes PhD student Neal Sheth (PhD Cancer and Genomics) and postdoctoral researcher Dr Joseph Wragg (PhD Cancer Research, 2016). Their work is funded by the charity Alice's Arc, doing ground-breaking work to improve treatment for children with rhabdomyosarcoma (RMS), a soft tissue cancer.

> **"Charitable support is a cornerstone of any lab."**
>
> *Professor Susanne Gatz*

'These students are early in their career, are excited and even a bit more open-minded,' says Professor Gatz. 'Funding for research into rare cancers such as childhood sarcomas is hard to find, so charitable support is a cornerstone of any lab. In these unusual cancers, where we don't yet have the answers, it's so important that we can take risks to see if we can discover something truly ground-breaking. This model of working in collaboration with charities is unlocking new potential.'

Alice's Arc was founded by Sara and David Wakeling while their daughter was battling childhood cancer, working with other families affected to raise money for rhabdomyosarcoma research. After losing their daughter Alice in 2019 they have continued to fund and support vital research. For Professor Gatz their support is key: 'It's so important to have this funding for people in the lab dedicated to RMS. These students will then carry with them this dedication and knowledge, and be the foundation for future childhood cancer research. They are the key to make this research happen.'

Watch Susanne talk about her motivations and working with Alice's Arc by scanning the QR code here or visit **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/A23-next-gen-researchers**

The Supporters' view: we need fearless new thinking

'We are so proud to be funding the Azaylia Childhood Cancer PhD Fund,' says Azaylia Foundation CEO Cristian Parrino. 'The busy cancer experts we work with – those who see first-hand the devastating realities faced by young cancer patients – have insights and ideas they aren't always able to take into the laboratory themselves. By fully funding two clinicians to do PhDs in paediatric oncology, we can take the next steps in research, and build a team of specialists who can take their results back into practice.'

> **"The Azaylia PhD Scholarships will produce new leaders and a brighter future for children with cancer."**
>
> *Cristian Parrino*

The Azaylia Foundation was set up in 2021 in memory of Azaylia Diamond Cain, daughter of former Coventry City footballer Ashley Cain and Safiyya Vorajee. The first of two PhD projects will start early next year, looking at B cell lymphomas - cancers that start in the immune system, which can have a low survival rate for those resistant to treatment or who relapse.

The PhD student's view: research creates a ripple effect that could benefit us all

Dr Silvia Panetti (PhD Immunology and Immunotherapy 2023) says: 'My project explored novel ways of engineering T cells to recognise and fight cancer cells. These cells, called CAR-T cells, were modified to improve their metabolism and be more efficient once near the tumour. It has been an incredible scientific journey, in which I tried to expand our knowledge on CAR-T cell immunotherapy for childhood cancers, as well as adult. I was mentored and supported by my supervisors, Dr De Santo and Dr Mussai, and other leading academics here at Birmingham, all the way to publication in a major peer-reviewed journal, which was extremely rewarding.

'Overall, the University of Birmingham has prepared me so well for a future in cancer research that I could not have asked for anything more. I received invaluable scientific training, honest and constructive peer-review and incredible moral support. My PhD work was made possible thanks to the incredible generosity of the Martin family, and I am so grateful to them for giving me the opportunity to be where I am now. I will now continue my journey in cancer research and hope one day to be able to nurture the next generation of researchers in the same way I have been nurtured here. I am and I will always be a "Martins Fellow", and I am so thankful for the opportunity to be where I am now.'



Dr Silvia Panetti

Silvia's supporters

Robert and Sarah Martin have been supporting cancer research at the University since 2017, and were delighted to support Silvia's cutting-edge research investigating novel immunology treatments of the future, which has helped launch a new clinical trial for child and adult patients among other successes.

'Like many others, we have seen the effects of cancer first-hand. We have been able to support two PhD students and a Post-Doc scientist, and have enjoyed being able to visit and meet the students. It's so rewarding to hear the work Silvia and the team are doing is already making a difference, and we are proud to have been able to help in this way.'

> **"My PhD work was made possible thanks to the incredible generosity of the Martin family."**
>
> *Dr Silvia Panetti*

Find out how you can help save lives funding the brightest minds in cancer research by visiting **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-next-gen-health-bia** or email **giving@contacts.bham.ac.uk**

Student volunteers are **changing lives**

The power of volunteering

What you learn at Birmingham can help make the world a better place. Hundreds of students are putting their passions into action on key social issues, such as loneliness, poverty, homelessness and healthcare.



Students regularly volunteer to support their communities, from litter picking to working with charities such as first aiders St John Ambulance and eating disorder charity BEAT.

For students, it is a chance to try new things, get valuable experience for their CV, explore the complexities of key issues and make a difference in their area. And having discovered volunteering at University, many keep on helping others as graduates.

Feeding fellow students in a cost-of-living crisis

The Community Pantry at the Guild of Students was set up at the start of the cost-of-living crisis, to help any student in difficulties. Volunteer George Bevan says: 'I got involved with the Community Pantry because I just wanted to make the world a better place and give back to a community which had given a lot to me while I was a student here.

'I was involved in putting together and distributing food parcels for students who needed support, collecting food donated around campus, taking stock of what food we had, making sure the food wasn't out-of-date and communicating with other volunteers about what jobs needed to be done etc.

> **"I was involved in putting together and distributing food parcels for students who needed support."**

George Bevan

'The experience has given me a lot of insight into the struggles of some people much less fortunate than myself and has made me even more determined to volunteer to help people who need help in the future. Seeing fellow students who are genuinely grateful for the help we've given them and knowing they have enough food now to make it through the next couple of weeks was so rewarding and made me feel extremely good about myself.'



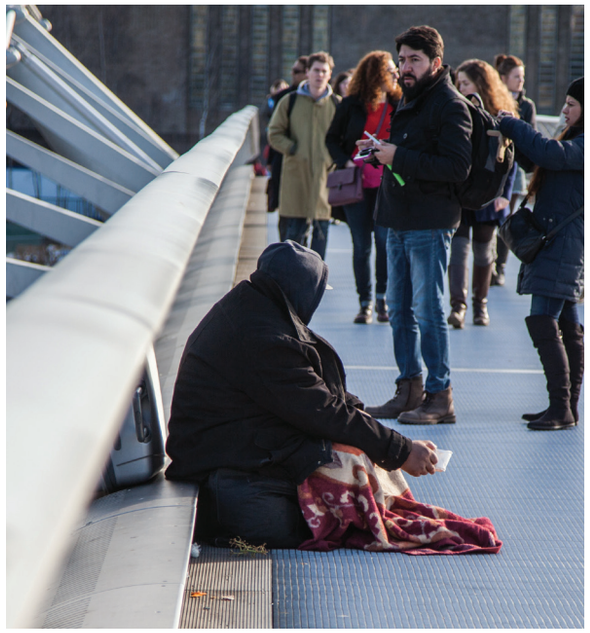




Helping Fab 'N' Fresh students get home safe

'We had heard of students getting hurt or not feeling safe walking home, and we knew that after a couple of drinks, some students were finding all the difficulties of the last few years bubbling up,' says Sam Haynes (third year BA Philosophy student). 'So we set up outside the Guild during Fab 'N' Fresh nights to offer bottles of water, a listening ear and help with finding a cab or to walk people home.'

Donors on the panel of the Alumni Impact Fund (AIF), which supports student ideas, were impressed to see that students wanted to look after each other. The AIF has funded the Christian Union student society to start offering hot chocolate and toast in the winter months. The vote of confidence has attracted more volunteers, so they can help students at sports nights and grad balls too.



Supporting people experiencing homelessness

Brandon Doherty (BA Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, 2016) had not thought about volunteering before he came to University. He says: 'One of the requirements for my scholarship was to give something back to others as a volunteer. I had no idea how rewarding I would find it.

'I started volunteering with Kids Adventure, which began as a student volunteering group at Birmingham. We provided disadvantaged kids with respite breaks over Easter and summer, who might otherwise have had nothing to do.'

Now a graduate, Brandon continues to volunteer with Birmingham homelessness charity Let's Feed Brum, adding: 'I'm a team leader two nights every week. We source and hand out food, offer a friendly ear to listen, and help people find specialist support, such as mental health services.'

Find out more about how the Alumni Impact Fund is kickstarting student projects to help others at **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-alumni-impact-fund**.

You can also volunteer as a mentor using your skills and experience to help students build their personal and professional journey — read about mentoring on page 8 and sign up via the back cover of *Old Joe*.

How to get published:

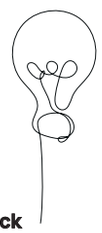
drafts, discipline and what separates us from machines



Got an idea for a book? Professor Luke Kennard, Head of the Department of Film and Creative Writing (pictured) and an award winning poet and fiction author, gives us his top tips on getting published, how he developed his writing, what inspires him and why the arts are so important.

We are not machines. If there is no art, if there is no philosophy, if there is no sense of history, then we will be living like insects. Such a central part of being alive is expression, communication and creativity. That is why arts and writing and literature are so important; if we can't narrate what's happening and nobody has the communication skills, the critical thinking skills, the imagination to actually be able to describe it, then we are really in trouble. I think the worst world to live in would be one where the only thing that motivates us is profit.

In most workshops or seminars that I teach, somebody will come up with a response to a simple writing exercise that deeply impresses me; an incredible start to a poem, some fantastic imagery or a compelling story. That's what I love about teaching; it is humbling but really important to remind yourself there are so many people who can write really well. Most are just never given the opportunity.



As a child I used to stay up reading until two o'clock in the morning, then I'd be exhausted at school. I read the usual stuff like *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but I also was obsessed with American science fiction. It was quite escapist, being able to enter another world that felt as real to me as everyday life and spend time there. I wanted to emulate that, so I started trying to write my own stories.

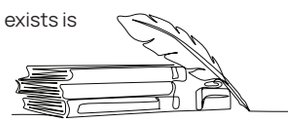
Instead of forming meaningful friendships with my peers, I was writing lots of dreadful derivative science fiction stories. I got into the habit of writing quite young, even though a lot of it was just unreadably bad. I got a lot of really bad writing out of my system at quite an early age.

I had a great English teacher at secondary school, who very generously read the short stories that I wrote outside of class. That was quite formative for me, because he not only recommended writers that I read, but he was the first person that told me I had talent for writing.



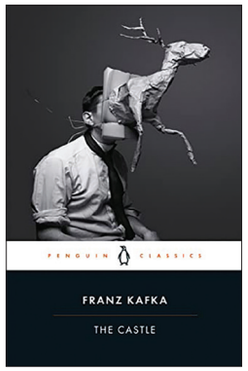
Before I had kids I would try and write at least 500 words a day, knowing that a lot of it would be scrapped. If you can write a thousand words a day, which is not impossible even around work and around other duties, you can have a full draft of a novel in three months. Whether it's any good or not is another matter!

What I really love about going to spoken word poetry events is that anyone can just turn up and get a five minute set. You can immediately tell whether you actually like something you've written, when you're having to stand there and deliver it to an audience. An important part of why poetry still exists is that it is popular and democratic, even though it has this aura of being refined and specialised.



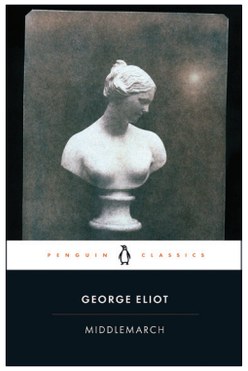
Writers like to hide out in the suburbs and pretend to be normal. They act like they are ordinary people, but all the time they are taking notes and constantly working on something. Authors live in secret; dropping the kids off at school, then going home to write transgressive novels.

Luke's book recommendations for writers (and all readers)



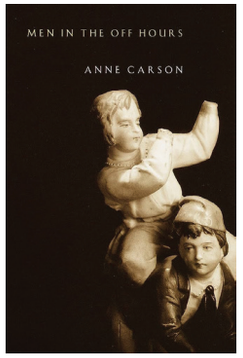
Franz Kafka: *The Castle*

'It's his funniest book that is also the most frighteningly accurate book about the human condition. It's an unfinished novel, but it's just magnificent. It's confusing and disorientating, but it's a good bridge from science fiction and fantasy into high end literary fiction. It is really enjoyable and oddly amusing.'



George Eliot: *Middlemarch*

'It is one of these books that I appreciate more now in my forties than I did reading it at university. When I go back to it now, I'm just blown away by it. It's unparalleled. Something that I think I'll just carry on rereading for the rest of my life. Maybe it's the ultimate novel.'



Anne Carson: *Men in the Off Hours*

'It is everything that she does, in one collection. It is such an amalgamation of different forms, but with this powerfully consistent voice, conversational and almost anecdotal, but fiercely intelligent. She's somebody who has been a massive influence on me.'

Luke's top tips for aspiring authors

- **Don't compromise.** If you want to do this, your main duty - as with any artist - is to make something that you would be delighted by and that you yourself love.
- **Find an agent or an editor who sees what you're doing.** You need someone who likes it, respects it and will give you advice on how to make it as good as it can be.
- **Hone a really good opening 50 pages.** Send it to 60 people and see what comes back.
- **Have the necessary humility to develop.** I've mentored and advised people in the past, but when it comes to changing their work, they just quit.
- **We all still need advice.** We need a good agent, somebody who will be on our side, but also criticise our work when we need it.
- **One day, you might be on a prize shortlist.** However, even once you have been published, there will still be times where nobody is interested in your work at all.
- **Keep that focus on your writing**. Keep that focus on doing it because you love it.



Win Luke's favourite books

To be in with a chance to win Luke's three favourite books, tell us:

What is the minimum amount of words Luke recommends writing each day?

Send us your answer with your name, address and phone number to **alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk** by **1 March 2024**.

See **oldjoe.co.uk** for terms and conditions.



50 years of friendship

Returning to where it all began, nine friends who first met in halls of residence in 1971 reunited in 2023 to celebrate their 70th birthdays on Edgbaston campus.

The first four friends met in Wyddrington Hall (opened in 1965-6 and later combined with Lake Hall to form Shackleton Hall), living together on 'the purple corridor' before the group gradually expanded through shared courses and partners.

Firm friends by second year, everyone moved into private accommodation on Tiverton Road in Selly Oak and rapidly bonded with the local community.

Image above:
Roger Hawkes (MBChB Medicine, 1976), David Beavers (BSocSci West African Studies, 1974), Mary Hawkes née Derbyshire (BA Music and Physical Education, 1974), Teresa Cornwell (BA Music and French, 1975), Julian Bowden (BSocSci Russian Studies, 1974; MSocSci Political Science and International Studies, 1977), Sue Knottenbelt (BSocSci West African Studies, 1974), Maggie Bowden née Everson (BA Russian Language and Literature, 1975), Tom Stenhouse (MBChB Medicine, 1976) and Caroline Halle (MBChB Medicine, 1976).

Memories of Selly Oak

Their house had no heating or running hot water, and they spent the winter scraping ice off the windows. With just one gas fire and no fridge, the group had to buy their food on a daily basis.

One option for a good value meal was the Danish Food Centre. Opened by members of the Danish Royal Family in 1971, the Centre provided an all you could eat buffet. The group would dive in – and also make sure they took food home for later.

The sense of community in Selly Oak was special, as Sue explains: 'On the first day we moved in, I went to find a corner shop to get some bread and milk.

'As I wandered around the area I met a little boy named Rajinder who was playing on the street. He was very friendly and guided me to a shop. His family lived in one of the back to back houses in Selly Oak.

'His dad worked at Cadbury's and because he couldn't always be around due to night shifts, Rajinder used to invite us to his school plays and parents' evenings.'

The group eventually lost touch with Rajinder after graduating but at one of their early reunions, decided to try and find him. Adverts were posted in the *Birmingham Mail* and the Birmingham City Council newspaper and some months later, a business card landed on Sue's doorstep. Sue was thrilled to be at the wedding of Rajinder's daughter.

Hitchhiking through a civil war

The late 1960s and early 1970s saw significant changes to culture and society, with the group recalling student protests on campus. For Rag Week, Teresa and Caroline (known to everyone as Halle) took part in a charity challenge to hitchhike from Birmingham to John O'Groats and then to Land's End. They completed the challenge in just 76 hours, which put them in *The Guinness Book of Records*.

The pair were so comfortable with hitchhiking that in the summer of 1973, they decided to tour around South Africa and visit Sue at her family home in Salisbury, Zimbabwe (known as Rhodesia at the time) by hitching lifts across the country – all during civil war.

Halle says: 'We hitchhiked the entire holiday and camped most of the time, carrying all our stuff in rucksacks. Being young (I had my 20th birthday there) we didn't worry too much about safety!

'I wasn't aware of the civil war but seeing the apartheid system was shocking from the moment we landed in Johannesburg, with different exits according to the colour of one's skin.'



Reunions begin

Over the years the group would visit each other during holidays, squeezing into each other's houses even while bringing up families – with several children also going on to attend Birmingham for their degrees.

Formal reunions began 25 years ago and the group eventually decided to arrange week long annual holidays. In recent years they have chased the sun in Croatia, France, Mallorca, Menorca, mainland Italy, Sicily and Corsica, as well as stays in the Cotswolds and Yorkshire.

The tradition has become that an 'AGM' is held near the end of each vacation, with the group discussing where they would like to go next and one couple being nominated to arrange the following year's holiday. For 2023, with many celebrating their 70th birthdays with their own families, it was decided to keep things more low-key, with a special return to the University's Edgbaston campus for the first time since 2011.

There they made a donation towards sanctuary scholarships, having seen another group of friends offer their support to students in similar fashion in the spring 2022 edition of *Old Joe*.

Mary says: 'We thought it was a lovely thing to do given the lifelong friendships we have formed thanks to the University. We researched the different kinds of scholarships available and chose sanctuary scholarships after putting it to a vote.'

Learn more about sanctuary scholarships at **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-sanctuary-scholarships**

> **"We hitchhiked the entire holiday and camped most of the time, carrying all our stuff in rucksacks."**
>
> *Caroline Halle*

If you'd like to organise a reunion with your friends from University, the Alumni Events team have just the resource: Reunion in a Box.

Visit **uob.oldjoe.co.uk/OJ-A23-reunion-box**

Your stories:
autumn 2023

Where did your Birmingham education take you?

Share your updates with us through our website or tweet us **@birminghamalum** using **#wearebrumalum.**

Julia Thomas
(BA Music and Drama, 1994)

Our nine piece University soul band Swing Your Pants has reunited — we are working on two gigs for people's 50ths! Swing Your Pants was formed in 1992 and performed in University of Birmingham events, pubs and clubs between 1992-1995 including supporting Doctor and the Medics in the Deb Hall.

It's been amazing to reconnect with these fabulous humans and share stories of our time at the University, as though the 30-year gap has vanished! We communicate regularly through WhatsApp and are even endorsed by the original children's TV presenters Trev and Simon, who coined the phrase Swing Your Pants!



'Swing Your Pants' gigs 1992 - 1995, plus their reunion in 2023.

Gursharan Kaur Bharth
(MRes Clinical Psychology, 2011)

Since graduating from Birmingham, I've earned a MSEd in General and Special Education and have been working in the field of early childhood education, from teaching to becoming the Director of Preschool Instruction for an education company called the New York Kids Club and Preschool.

I am proud to have recently published my first children's picture book, *Veer's First Day of School*. In 1997, I emigrated from Punjab, India to Queens, New York. This journey has been the inspiration behind the book as both my younger brother and I created our own space in a new country.

The book is designed to start conversations about diversity and inclusion, encouraging children, families and educators to explore similarities and differences bridging the gap between home and school.



Gursharan Kaur Bharth alongside the cover artwork for her book, Veer's First Day of School.

Sohail Saqlain
(MSc Health Management for Developing Countries, 1991)

I owe my 30-year health career to my beloved University of Birmingham and the training I received. My work has taken me all over the world, from setting up schools for community midwives in Pakistan, a Research Assistant role in the Department of Public Health, to a variety of roles within the Government of Pakistan.

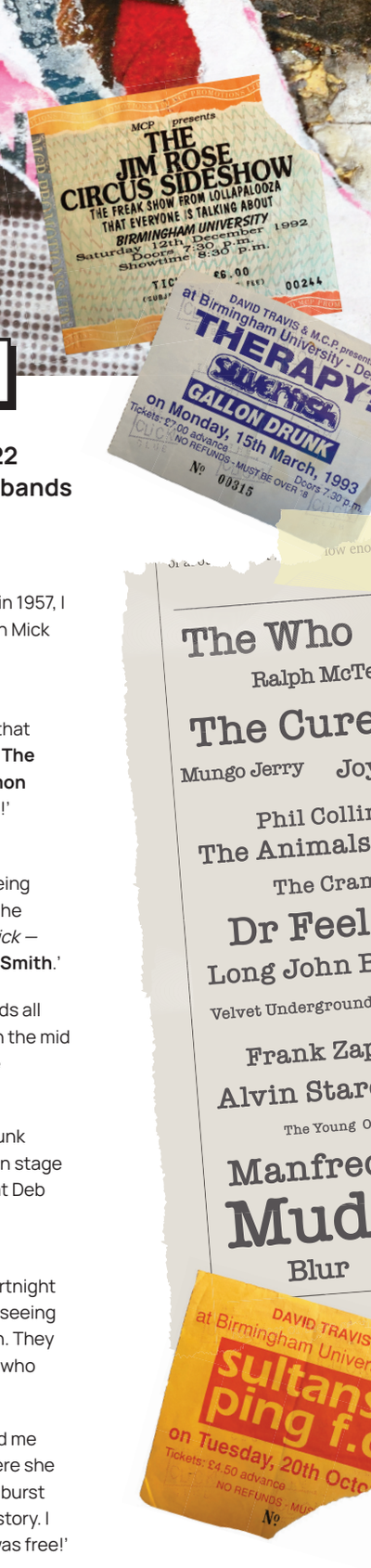
I currently work at the Government of Punjab's Population Innovation Fund (PPIF) as Technical Advisor and am proud to be part of the Visiting Faculty at the Harvard School of Public Health. Wherever I have been in the world I have stayed connected to Birmingham – I am now President of the Lahore Chapter of the Birmingham Alumni Association of Pakistan (BAAP).



MSc Health Management for Developing Countries, taken outside Garth House (Professor Saqlain is top right).

Go to oldjoe.co.uk for more alumni stories – can you spot anyone you know?

POP COMES TO CAMPUS
your memories



Remember our article 'Pop comes to campus' in the autumn 2022 edition of *Old Joe*? You sent us so many wonderful memories of bands you saw on campus as part of the UK university touring circuit.

50s

John Jennings (LLB Law, 1958) 'As Vice-Chairman of Carnival Committee in 1957, I arranged a number of dances, including a Jazz Ball in the Debating Hall with Mick Mulligan and his vocalist, **George Melly**.'

60s

Paul Jolley (BDS Dentistry, 1971) 'I was at Birmingham when many bands that would become famous played. I saw **Jethro Tull, Fairport Convention** and **The Move** play on the same bill at Deb Hall and **Ten Years After, Family and Simon Dupree** and the **Big Sound** at High Hall, again on the same bill. Great times!'

70s

Andrew (Andy) Smith (BSc International Studies, 1980) 'I remember seeing **Gong** at the Guild and **Robin Trower** at Lake Hall — the latter was brilliant, the former, very strange. I reviewed a few Birmingham performances for *Redbrick* — including **Dr Feelgood** at the Odeon — immortalised under the by-line **Any Smith**.'

Sue McCleery (née Barron) (BSc Geography, 1977) 'Myself and two friends all remember seeing **Thin Lizzy** (fronted by Phil Lynott) play on the Vale site in the mid 70s. My friends also remember seeing **Mud** in the Students' Union and **The Strawbs** in the Great Hall.'

Steve Carey (BA Hispanic Studies, 1979) 'I saw **The Police** in 1977, at a 'punk night' at Lake Hall. They played some of their own songs and then stayed on stage as the backing band to **Cherry Vanilla**. I also saw **UB40** in their early days at Deb Hall in 1980, when they'd just come off a tour supporting **The Pretenders**.'

80s

Maria Janet Suarez (BA Spanish, 1983) 'We had excellent discos every fortnight at Mason Hall and it was a great place to live as a new student. I remember seeing the **Tom Robinson Band**. In 1982, I saw **Dr Feelgood** at the Students' Union. They were brilliant. In 1990, I came up from London specifically to see **Salvation** who played the Union.'

David Corns (LLB Law, 1986) 'A girl I met during Freshers' Week in 1983 told me about a band who were playing at the Students' Union who came from where she lived. The band in question were **The Smiths**. A month or so later they had burst onto the scene and later became one of the most iconic bands in music history. I am so pleased that I got the chance to see them in their early days and it was free!'

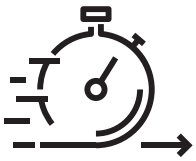


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- Help your mentee make a practical plan
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- Offer support to prepare for recruitment processes
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