



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

OLDJOE

ALUMNI AND FRIENDS MAGAZINE

Autumn 2020



COVID-19 superheroes

My virtual graduation

Fighting inequality in education

The first word

In July, I presided over the most unusual degree ceremony in the history of the University. I spoke to the Great Hall, which appeared empty, but the newest graduates to join our alumni family were all there in spirit. Across thousands of internet connections, we celebrated the extraordinary achievements of the Class of 2020, who graduated against the odds.

Birmingham's very first virtual graduations embody how all universities have had to operate differently as a result of the global crisis. Many students left our beautiful campus and studied remotely to help protect others. Lecturers rapidly found new ways to teach practical subjects online. Researchers pivoted to focus on responding to COVID-19.

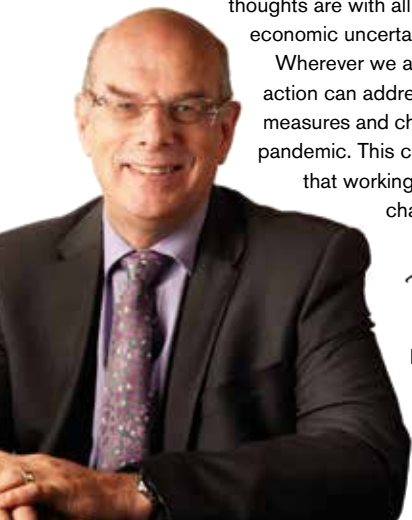
As we always do, our University community has risen to the challenge. Our researchers have developed virus and antibody tests, and found treatments that keep people out of intensive care. Students have supported those in need, by creating food banks and helping the NHS; read more on page 12.

Whenever I think I have the measure of our alumni community, you continue to astonish. This edition of *Old Joe* is packed with stories of the skills, abilities and commitment which characterise Birmingham graduates. So many of you supported Birmingham In This Together, our emergency appeal to develop new treatments and help students, part of our University campaign Birmingham In Action; read more from page 10. Thank you for everything you are doing. You can help reshape the world as we emerge from the pandemic.

Will students this year have the same kind of experience as you did? I can't know how much the world will have changed again by the time you read this, but we are currently blending teaching on campus with full online access to courses. We are delivering the Gold-rated teaching we are known for, plus the Birmingham experience which students value so much, with stringent safety measures, practical help, and mental health support built-in. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are facing greater hardship than usual, so we are supporting a record 650 students through Pathways to Birmingham, many funded by alumni.

The difficulties we all face are not over yet. At the University, we have lost colleagues and friends. Students are encountering unexpected hardship. My thoughts are with all of you who have lost loved ones or who face economic uncertainty.

Wherever we are in the world, we have shown that collective action can address a crisis; we have come together to take measures and change behaviours to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This collaborative effort and sacrifice has proven that working together will help us overcome the global challenges we all face.



Best wishes,
Professor Sir David Eastwood DL
Vice-Chancellor and Donor

GUEST
EDITOR



PAV KAHLOH
(BSc Economics, 2020)

'It's thanks to a scholarship that I am one of Birmingham's newest graduates. The Access to Birmingham scholarship, funded by alumni, helped me practically and enabled me to meet other people with similar goals.

'I want to help others like me, so I was proud to be an A2B Ambassador and Campaign Maker as part of Birmingham In Action, the University's campaign to make a real difference on global issues; read more on page 24.

'Writing my dissertation during lockdown was tough; not having a study space whilst trying to research NHS waiting lists with my four-year-old brother running round and my lovable but loud dad getting to grips with video calls.

'I'm so sad to have missed those last moments with friends in our third year. I made my graduation cap from cardboard and watched the Vice-Chancellor lead the online ceremonies in the garden with my parents. Read more about our virtual graduations on page 8.

'The job market in a pandemic was always going to be tough, but I'm working part-time while I look for my dream role. Wish me luck.'

Let us know if you would like to be a guest editor via alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk

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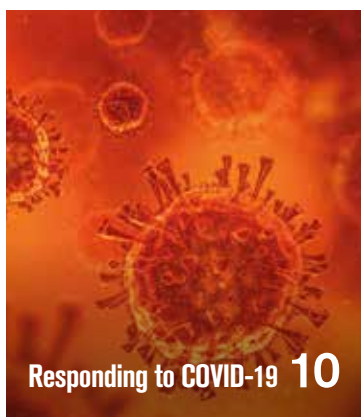
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It has been an unpredictable year . . .

The articles in *Old Joe* are accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time we go to print. However, we recognise that things continue to change rapidly this year. To see whether there have been any updates, visit www.oldjoe.co.uk

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

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OFFICIAL
PARTNER



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

UNIVERSITY WARMING UP FOR COMMONWEALTH GAMES

Birmingham's world-class teaching and research will be presented to a truly global audience following the announcement that the University is an Official Partner of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

The partnership is the most comprehensive university agreement in the history of the Games, which will have an anticipated global audience of 1.5 billion people.

Staff and students will also have a number of ways to get involved with the Games, including volunteering opportunities, and taking part in the Queen's Baton Relay, as it travels through Commonwealth nations and territories.

As part of the partnership, the Vale will open its doors to some of the

world's finest athletes as the principal campus village for the Games.

Our Edgbaston campus was already set to be the location for the Games' squash and hockey tournaments, but will now also be home to almost 3,000 athletes and officials.

The University will also be hosting the 2023 IBSA World Games, a multi-sport event for blind and partially sighted athletes, which will feature more than 1,000 competitors across more than 70 nations.

Are you an athlete intending to compete in the Commonwealth or IBSA World Games, or part of a coaching team? Let us know at alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk and you could be featured in the next *Old Joe*.

MAXIMISING PLACES FOR A LEVEL STUDENTS

Many A level students went through a stressful time in August, as A level grades were awarded in lieu of cancelled exams. The challenges for students, schools, colleges and teachers have been significant.

The University welcomed all students who achieved their place based on grades adjusted by the algorithm. In addition, the University honoured offers for students who missed their offer with Birmingham based on their algorithm grade, but who met the criteria based on the revised grades as predicted by their teachers.

The only exceptions were where the number of places are externally capped and/or where the University is reliant on external placements, which are limited in number. These include Medicine, Dentistry, Dental Hygiene and Therapy, Nursing, Social Work, Physiotherapy, Applied Golf Management Studies, and degree apprenticeships in Computer Science in partnership with PWC and Vodafone.

Read more at www.birmingham.ac.uk/undergraduate/2020-admissions-and-appeals



CHANCELLOR BECOMES BRITISH INDUSTRY LEADER

University Chancellor Lord Bilimoria has been elected as the President of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

The founder of Cobra Beer and an Independent Crossbench Peer in the UK House of Lords, Lord Bilimoria is the first President in the organisation's history from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background.

He says: 'I am honoured to be President of the CBI during this hugely important time for UK business. As the four nations of our country embark upon an ambitious economic recovery plan, I will do all I can to help ensure we build back better through inclusive and sustainable growth.'



SHARING SCIENCE with everyone

Professor Alice Roberts has been honoured with the inaugural Royal Society David Attenborough Award for her outstanding contributions to public engagement.

Alice has been Professor of Public Engagement in Science at the University since 2012 and is also President of the British Science Association.

'I passionately believe that science – all this wonderful knowledge that humans have come together to create – should be open to everyone,' Alice says. 'This knowledge helps us make better decisions – personally, and as a society – but science can also be beautiful, inspirational and a source of wonder and real joy.'

'I love sharing these stories and I am delighted to be honoured by the Royal Society with this award, named for one of our greatest science storytellers.'

Debunking the 'patient zero' myth

Researchers at the University of Birmingham have established that the coronavirus epidemic in the UK did not have a single source of origin and that there was no 'patient zero.'

A preliminary study by researchers at the University of Oxford, University of Edinburgh, and the COVID-19 Genomics UK Consortium (COG-UK), suggests that the SARS-CoV-2 virus entered the UK mostly from European countries during March.

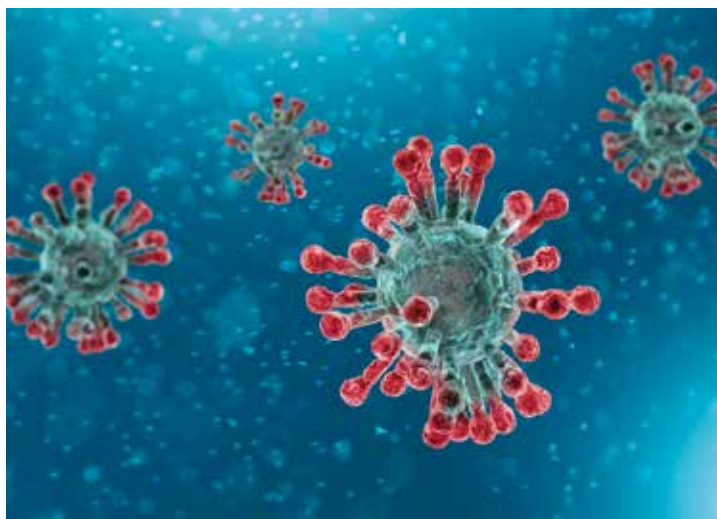
Nick Loman, Professor of Microbial Genomics and Bioinformatics in the Institute of Microbiology and Infection, is leading the team at Birmingham who are part of COG-UK.

The study found that the UK epidemic was composed of a very large number of transmission lineages. Each lineage was founded

by a separate introduction event from inbound international travel, then grew through local transmission within the UK. Importation intensity to the UK rose rapidly in early March, peaked around 15 March, then quickly declined to a low level in April.

Early importations from Italy were, by early March, surpassed in number by importations from inbound travellers from Spain and France. The diversity of source locations also increased in March, with importations attributed to a growing range of countries. The contribution of China and other Asian countries to the number of importations was very small.

At the time of writing, the report had not been peer-reviewed. Work on the data is ongoing and findings may change in the future.



Read more about the University's work on COVID-19 at
www.birmingham.ac.uk/coronavirus

YEAR IN PICTURES

1



2



1. DUBAI EXPANSION: Here's the latest look at the new campus for the University of Birmingham Dubai. Opening in 2021, the campus will be home to 2,900 students, acting as a community for Birmingham alumni in the region and a hub for community outreach and engagement activities. The University is now one of the top places in Dubai to study law.

2. A WELCOMING CARNIVAL: Welcome Week had a different look for 2020 as the University and the Guild opened Lakeside, a new COVID-19-safe outdoor venue. Social distancing restrictions were in place and students could enjoy the cinema, a drink, street food and live music in a carnival by the Vale lake.

3



3. TAKE TO THE SKIES: Get a new perspective on the University thanks to an aerial tour. The University's film crew, Creative Media, returned to campus during the summer to send a drone through the Edgbaston campus. The flyby includes Aston Webb, Birmingham Medical School and the Barber Institute of Fine Arts. Watch the video at www.oldjoe.co.uk

Campus r♥mances



ALUMNI FROM ACROSS THE DECADES TELL THEIR STORIES OF FINDING LOVE ON CAMPUS.

Dr Bruce Yung (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1983; PhD Chemical Engineering, 1987) and Mrs Bee Lang Yung (née Gan) (BSc Chemical Engineering, 1983; MSc Chemical Engineering 1987)

'We met in 1980, during our first year when Bee wanted to borrow some of my homework for references. I replied "no problem" within five nanoseconds. We got married in 1983 after our graduation and continued with our respective postgraduate research studies. After three years of hard work, we achieved not only our second degrees but also our first-born, Victoria Yung, in 1986. Almost 40 years came and went, and our careers traversed across the UK, the US, Hong Kong and mainland China, as did our abodes. I worked in the energy investment business and Bee focused on the chemical business, primarily with Dow Corning. We are both happily retired now and living in Hong Kong. The University has facilitated both our education as well as our romance and we are forever grateful! We are currently working with the Alumni Office to explore how we might recognise this, by giving back to Birmingham through our philanthropy.' *Bruce and Bee*



Meg Tapp (BA English with Creative Writing, 2014) and Chris Pembridge (LLB Law, 2014)

'We met through a mutual friend in the summer after our first year at Birmingham. We became best friends, serving on the committee for the Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society and fell in love after we graduated. Chris is a barrister and I now work in communications for an environmental charity. We both have very fond memories of Birmingham, Selly Oak and Saturday nights at Fab 'n' Fresh. Due to lockdown, our May wedding has sadly been postponed, but we look forward to our special day and coming back to visit our old campus as husband and wife.' *Meg*



Daisy Zheng (MSc International Marketing, 2019) and Chris Melvin (BSc Chemistry, 2018)

'Chris and I met outside of campus at the right time and the right place. I was courageous enough to speak to him in a public place and we're both glad I did. Discovering we both went to Birmingham and lived in Jarratt Hall in separate years brought us closer when we first met. This photo was taken when we visited campus a year after Chris's graduation. Coming from two different ethnicities and also nationalities, there are so many uncertainties along the way. However, we never have any doubts about our future together.' *Daisy*



Jonty Crowley (BA Drama and English Literature, 2013) and Shauna Gavaghan (BA Drama and English Literature, 2014)

'Although our paths had crossed a few times and we had some mutual friends, it wasn't until towards the end of our time at Birmingham that we properly got to know each other. When I graduated, we were still "unofficial" and unsure about making things more serious. However, we bumped into each other by chance at Glastonbury over that summer and haven't looked back since! We now live and work in London with our cat Christian and owe it all to studying at Birmingham.' *Jonty*



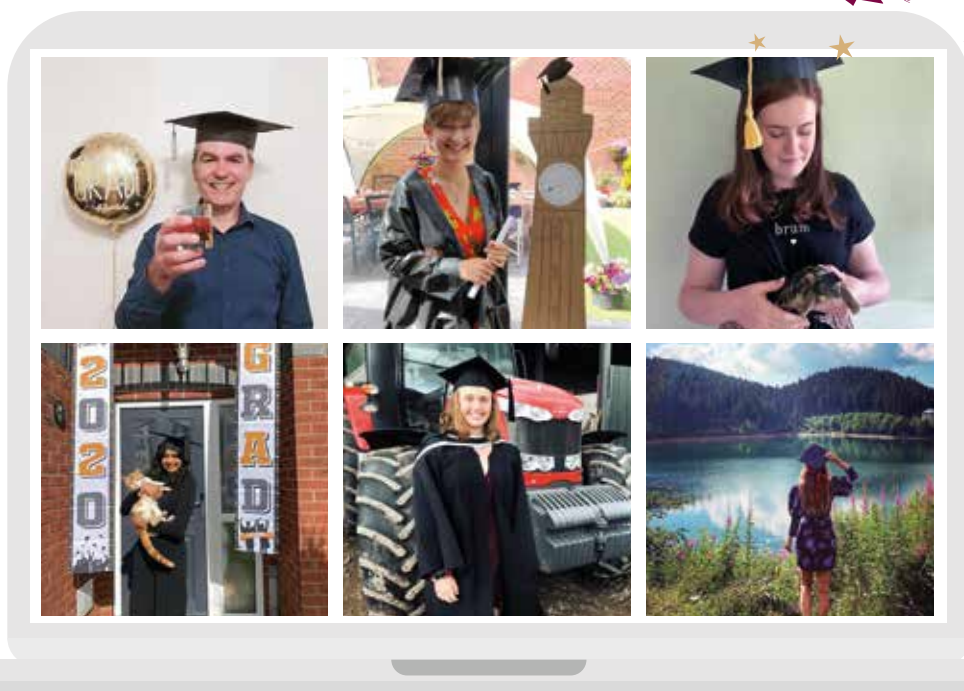
Did you meet your significant other at Birmingham? We'd love to hear your story and want to include as many diverse stories as possible, including alumni in our LGBTQ+ community. Send yours to: alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk or tweet @birminghamalum. Find more stories of love online at www.oldjoe.co.uk





My virtual graduation

It wasn't how anyone expected to end their time at Birmingham, but the incredible and resilient Class of 2020 embraced their virtual graduation through ceremonies with friends, cardboard cut-outs of Old Joe and homemade gowns and mortarboards.



While nothing can replace the atmosphere on campus, the University hosted its first-ever virtual graduation celebrations this July to celebrate all that the Class of 2020 achieved. The opening ceremony on YouTube recreated some of the magic with traditional graduation music from the Birmingham Symphonic Brass Orchestra and the Vice-Chancellor addressing students virtually from the Great Hall.

Individual Schools held ceremonies on Zoom with video messages from academic staff and alumni from around the world. The celebrations also included a digital yearbook, a

special poem written by two graduates and a virtual reciting of the Birmingham version of the Hippocratic Oath for medical students, some of whom finished their degrees early to help fight the COVID-19 pandemic on the NHS frontline.

Watch the celebrations at www.oldjoe.co.uk and read on to see how people celebrated and their reflections from their time at Birmingham. Welcome to the alumni community, Class of 2020!

● Images: Henry Poole, Bronwyn Francis, Kitt Holohan, @drhirazajamil, @issie_brown, Andreea Irimia



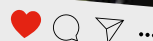
KATHRYN MYERS (BA DRAMA AND ENGLISH, 2020)

'After three years studying Drama and English at the University, I envisioned a lovely celebration in the summer sun with my close friends, family and loved ones. Little did I know that I would be viewing a graduation ceremony on my laptop from my living room. The personal and transferable skills I've developed throughout the years (resilience, communication, independence) have all come in handy in adapting to the changes.

'Although it was an unconventional graduation, we made the most of it. I crafted my own mortarboard hat out of cardboard and decorated the top with symbols and iconic images to remind me of my University journey (moving from Thailand to live and study in the UK); baked a celebratory chocolate cake; and spent the day sharing videos, messages and calls with my family online rather than in person. It wasn't exactly what I imagined the day would be like, but it'll still be a graduation to remember. I've got another shot at it with further study – a Masters in English Language, Culture and Communication at the University – and I'll be back for the celebration on campus.'

CONGRATULATIONS TO LLOYDS SCHOLARS SHEVINA SHAW (BSC PSYCHOLOGY, 2020) AND ABIGAIL BULLOCK (LLB LAW, 2020).

Shevina had a graduation party at home with family and friends. Reflecting on her time at University, she says: 'My proudest achievement during my time at University is being nominated as one of the Top 100 future leaders of African Caribbean descent by *Future Leaders* magazine from Powerful Media in conjunction with HSBC. This magazine showcases the top 100 students in the UK and is sent around to hundreds of employers, schools and sixth forms to inspire the next generation. This is an achievement for me because I had a challenging background and upbringing. I was able to push through all the obstacles and break boundaries to achieve all that I have today.'

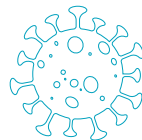
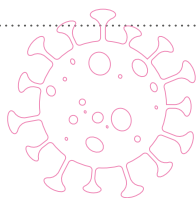


Abigail says: 'One of my proudest achievements at University is helping to secure ongoing support for future Access to Birmingham (A2B) scholarship recipients through roles such as A2B Ambassador, Student Fundraiser and Campaign Maker. It has been a privilege to meet alumni and have the opportunity to thank donors. Personally, the scholarships I received throughout my degree provided much more than valuable financial support. Experiencing first-hand the passion and generosity of the donor community increased my confidence and self-belief. This, together with the support of my family, inspired me to never give up.'

Read more about the Pathways to Birmingham programme on page 28.

The University will also be providing the Class of 2020 with an on-campus celebration when government guidelines allow.

To celebrate the Class of 2020, the Alumni Office commissioned a poem written in collaboration between Bethany O'Brien (BA English, 2020) and James Bunting (BA English and Philosophy, 2011). Alumni from around the world filmed themselves reading it. Watch the video at www.oldjoe.co.uk



What we did *when the virus hit...*

Millions of people around the world have had COVID-19 and our thoughts are with all those who have lost a family member, friend or colleague. Over the last year, your University has been working round the clock to help those affected by COVID-19, tackling everything from the impact on cancer patients to air pollution. Below is a snapshot of the work taking place across campus and beyond.

Six reasons to be proud of your University's response to COVID-19

- 1 Delivered PPE and hand sanitiser** Over 190,000 items of personal protective equipment (PPE) were donated through the University to the NHS, care homes and other essential workers, by labs and research groups, partners and local schools. This included 500 face visors, which were 3D printed by Chemical Engineering researchers. Additionally, experts in the Collaborative Teaching Lab made hand sanitiser for frontline social care workers; visit www.oldjoe.co.uk to watch how they turned the Lab into a mini-factory.
- 2 The 'have you got it' test** Professor Alan McNally helped create the UK's first and biggest Lighthouse Lab, which vastly increased the number of tests the UK could carry out each day – plus the UK's first academic testing lab. In addition, Professor Andrew Beggs set up a rapid testing lab for local NHS staff in just six days, capable of testing 5,000 healthcare workers a day. As accurate as the NHS's gold standard test, our labs remain ready for any future waves of the virus.
- 3 Supporting students in unexpected hardship** We cancelled rent for all students in University halls who chose to return home, supported international students who were unable to travel and quickly set up online learning. Many students had lost the part-time jobs they were depending on to afford food, bills or rent in private housing, so we helped many through the University's Hardship Fund, which received three times as many requests than normal from students in urgent need of help.
- 4 Supporting people globally** Handwashing can be a lifesaver. How do you do it without clean water? Professors David Hannah, Iseult Lynch and Stefan Krause highlighted how knowledge of water availability, quality and access can help us understand the impact of the virus and develop strategies that can make the biggest difference in combatting the pandemic. In addition, Professor Jenny Phillimore's research on how the virus increases the suffering of the world's most vulnerable refugees was featured in *The Guardian*.
- 5 The 'have you had it' test** Professor Alex Richter (MBChB Medicine, 1996; MD Medicine, 2009), Professor Adam Cunningham and their team have developed antibody tests to help us understand big unanswered questions, such as whether antibodies will protect us from getting the virus again. Antibody tests need to be sensitive enough to tell whether someone asymptomatic has had it, and be specific to COVID-19, as we already have antibodies that recognise other coronaviruses like the common cold.
- 6 Heroes wear masks** Professor KK Cheng advocated early on in the pandemic for the role of masks as an important means of controlling the source of infections. In *The Lancet*, he argued that mask wearing 'shifts the focus from self-protection to altruism, actively involves every citizen, and is a symbol of social solidarity in the global response to the pandemic.'

Building better mental health during and after COVID-19



The psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 have been felt by everyone, and it has had a particular impact on the mental health of children and young people. The Office for National Statistics data has shown a doubling in the rates of depression in the pandemic and, in younger children, there has been an increase in emotional, behavioural and attention problems.

It was clear before the start of the year that there is an urgent need to prevent, detect and respond effectively to poor mental health in childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood to prevent long-term problems. Members of the Institute for Mental Health (IMH) have been working to support frontline NHS staff during the crisis, and ensure the longer-term impacts are addressed.

Supporting and working in the NHS
Professor Matthew Broome, Director of the Institute for Mental Health, explains: 'At the height of the pandemic, clinical academics from the IMH supported

NHS mental health services across Birmingham by taking on additional clinical duties, and by being redeployed to cover colleagues unable to work because they were unwell or shielding. A number of us also worked with University Hospitals Birmingham to develop and provide a psychological support service to NHS staff working acutely with patients with COVID-19.'

Research and impact

The IMH has also been involved in leading or adapting research projects in response to COVID-19. This included adapting the existing HSBC-funded project with Birmingham and Women's NHS Foundation Trust preventing bullying in schools, to include supporting teachers concerned about the trauma children will have experienced during lockdown. They are also part of a national study to examine the health outcomes from COVID-19, to assess mental health and neurological problems post-infection.

Influencing policy

The Institute views influencing policy as central to its work to ensure that every young person has good mental health. As Dr Karen Newbigging, Deputy Director of IMH argues: 'Immediate action needs to be taken to prevent this pandemic further widening entrenched social and economic inequalities. Longer-term, the government must consider an improved strategic, system-wide approach including the upscaling of community provision, and sustained investment in prevention to build better population mental health.'

Better support in the new normal?

Although our collective mental health has rarely faced such a challenge, the IMH has managed to highlight areas which have heralded promising innovations, such as stronger commitment to addressing homelessness and flexible working. As Professor Broome concludes, we need to look for bold solutions for such a major crisis: 'We hope our ongoing work will help support a "new normal" for mental health. We will all have to negotiate the profound consequences for mental health and equality that have been created by COVID-19.'

Top tips for supporting your mental health in a crisis:

- Stay connected – think about new ways to keep in touch with friends and family if you need to stay indoors
- Talk about your worries – it's normal to feel scared or worried during difficult times. There are lots of helplines available if you feel you need additional support
- Stay healthy – try to eat healthy food, exercise regularly and avoid smoking, drugs or too much alcohol
- Relax and sleep – take time to relax to help you overcome your worries, and maintain a regular sleeping pattern to help boost your mood

Support the work of our Institute for Mental Health and its fight to improve mental health provision for the most vulnerable people at www.birmingham.ac.uk/action/onmentalhealth



JESS



LYDIA



ALICE



EMMA

VOLUNTEERS

VERSUS THE VIRUS

We are immensely proud of the University students, staff and alumni who volunteered to help their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Meet some of our superheroes.

MEDICAL STUDENTS LEND A HELPING HAND TO THE NHS

Alice, Emma, Jess and Lydia set up the 'Birmingham Medical Students Helping Hands' Facebook group to connect medical students with NHS staff who needed support with non-clinical tasks. Volunteers delivered prescriptions, provided childcare, supported with school runs and helped with shopping.

Medical students also volunteered in a variety of roles in local hospitals. The 'Birmingham Med Students for Action' group placed over 500 students in hospitals and coordinated group training as NHS 111 call handlers to support the West Midlands Ambulance Service throughout the pandemic.

Medical students volunteered more than 100,000 hours of their time to support people affected by COVID-19, through these and other amazing projects.



DOCTOR OPERA AND DOCTOR DJ

Alex Aldren (Intercalated BMedSc, 2011; MBChB Medicine, 2014) trained as a doctor but pursued his dream of becoming an opera singer after graduation. During the pandemic, with many of the theatres closed, he returned to medicine to help in the NHS frontline and brought joy to the patients and NHS staff he's worked with by singing opera.

Fellow doctor and graduate Kishan Bodalia (MBChB Medicine, 2019) also lifted the spirits of those on the frontline by launching 'NHSessions', a virtual DJ session which he hosts from his kitchen in his hospital scrubs!

Listen to Alex sing and Kishan talk about his DJ'ing at www.oldjoe.co.uk



KEEPING FAMILIES IN TOUCH

The HKBN Group, whose senior management includes Billy Yeung (PGDip Business Administration, 1987; MBA, 1988) and Adrian Watt (BEng Electronic and Electrical Engineering, 1990), mobilised to help those in need in Hong Kong.

This included a free month of broadband for every customer, two years of free broadband for 10,000 disadvantaged families, tablets for care homes to ensure residents could keep in touch with their families through video calls, and three-month learning and career opportunities for 100 graduates who are entering a difficult job market.



STUDENTS SUPPORTING SELLY OAK

To help vulnerable members of their community, students set up the 'Selly Oak's Community Response to COVID-19' volunteer group on Facebook. Over 1,600 members have since joined; helping to collect and distribute food, pick up prescriptions and run vital errands for those in self-isolation and NHS staff at the QE Hospital. Thanks to generous funding from Santander Universities, students were able to purchase more food for those in need. Read more from one of the co-founders, Sarina, on page 14.



DEVELOPERS INVENT SOLUTIONS TO PANDEMIC PROBLEMS

Will Russell (Third year, BSc Computer Science) took part in the co-ordination of a global 'invention marathon.' 'Hack Quarantine' saw professionals and students (some from Birmingham) work round the clock to build solutions to issues caused by the pandemic.



STAFF SPOTLIGHT

In addition to collecting hundreds of boxes of PPE for the NHS and creating hand sanitiser for frontline social care workers, many University staff balanced working full-time with volunteering in the community. Sheila Boniface, Deputy Director of Operations (Education) in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences volunteered with BEAT charity as an 'Echo Peer Coach', helping parents of people with eating disorders, a service urgently needed during lockdown as anxiety levels rose. She was inspired to help because of her own daughter's personal experience with anorexia. Dean Worrall, who works in Timetabling and Examinations, volunteered with his local community support group, helping elderly people access food and pick up prescriptions.

THE GUILD OF STUDENTS

As many students volunteered, the Guild went above and beyond to support them during COVID-19, including:

- Creating a Virtual Neighbourhood on Facebook, an online community for students to support and connect with each other through online film nights, Joe's Pub Quiz, cooking classes, etc
- Providing support for students who continued to live in University accommodation during lockdown, through Student Mentors and Community Wardens
- Supporting Student Reps to work with the University to develop teaching and learning plans for the 2020/21 academic year

Read more from Tobi Adeyemi, President of the Guild of Students, on page 18.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed everyone's lives: having to adapt to new ways of learning and working, and connecting to loved ones and colleagues virtually. Alumna Belinda, staff member Geeta and student Sarina share their stories.

Life in LOCKDOWN



Enabling returning doctors to return to the NHS:

Belinda Yeldon (BA Political Science, 2015)

At the start of COVID-19, NHS England redeployed staff from their business-as-usual positions to respond to the pandemic. I was redeployed from my role as a Policy Manager in the Primary Care Networks Team to lead on programme management for 'The deployment of returning GPs into NHS 111 COVID Clinical Assessment Service (CCAS)'; a service which enables patients most at risk of COVID-19 to be reviewed and triaged appropriately when telephoning NHS 111.

In a matter of hours, I set up the programme task and finish group, meeting twice daily, and identified key actions, with action owners from multiple organisations. As GPs were returning to practice and working virtually from home, it was essential to determine and provide a comprehensive online training package; hosted by Health Education England, and procure IT equipment and software; delivered by NHSX. Over the subsequent days, by working with other government departments, including the Home Office, to ascertain HR checks required, I mapped the onboarding pathway and ensured a well-equipped team was in place at the employing organisation to onboard all returning GPs efficiently and effectively.

Implementing such a high-priority service was undeniably challenging, especially when adapting to working

from home whilst receiving hundreds of emails during my 15-hour workday. Being part of one of the most conscientious and dedicated teams I've ever worked with, my housemate making me numerous cups of tea daily and taking my one allowed walk (at midnight most nights) to clear my head unquestionably helped me deliver this programme.

In anticipation of the first wave peak over 1,500 returning GPs were onboarded, who have made over 300,000 patient contacts so far, significantly reducing patient waiting times. I've now returned to focus on Primary Care Network policy prompting me to say a huge 'thank you' to all the returning GPs who delivered, and continue to deliver care, to patients through the CCAS.



Supporting vital services: Geeta

Parashar, HR Business and Systems Analyst

The biggest change in lockdown is working from home. It's been difficult to not see my colleagues in person, but to help keep us connected I've become the 'quiz queen' for my team! My job has seen an increase in activity and pressure but I'm proud of how resilient the University staff community has been.

I normally have a long commute, so I've used that time for volunteering. Throughout lockdown, I helped a domestic violence charity and two homeless charities, all of which have recently seen a spike in demand for

services. I signed up for the NHS COVID-19 volunteering scheme and worked in a local pharmacy to allow the staff time off. I am part of the International Service Organisation which has, so far, made over 3,500 visors for local hospitals, care homes and a GP surgery in Coventry.

Volunteering is something I've always been passionate about and I feel fortunate to be able to do.

Coordinating student volunteers:

Sarina Shah (Third year, Modern Languages with Business Management)



Since lockdown began, it's been a bit of a rollercoaster. It was initially really hard not seeing any of my friends or family and adapting to studying online. Sometimes I felt quite unmotivated. I've learned a lot of remote skills through a virtual internship hosted by Careers Network.

I'm really proud of helping to set up the volunteer Community Response Group in Selly Oak, which has helped to connect vulnerable people in our area with volunteers who want to help. Students and staff at the University and local members of the community have delivered over 1,000 food parcels. We've also raised over £2,000 on GoFundMe to help us buy more food when we've experienced shortages. It's been amazing to see the response to our group and to see the community come together.

Hear more from our contributors at www.oldjoe.co.uk. Have these amazing stories inspired you to give back? Find out how you can volunteer to help students at Birmingham: www.birmingham.ac.uk/action/helpstudents

Playtime in a pandemic



The lockdown to counter the COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on the importance of children's education as many schools around the world were forced to close. But what of the importance of play? The University's Dr Anita Soni, from the School of Education and Oliver Wilson (PGCert Ed, 2005), Head Teacher of Woodhouse Primary School in Quinton, Birmingham explain the key role it takes in a child's development.

Lockdown saw many parents endeavouring to combine their work commitments with the need to provide home schooling for children.

In the UK alone, government guidance varied across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. While Nursery, Reception, Year One and Year Six pupils in England returned to school in June and July, many youngsters spent six months away from their teachers.

Media coverage often centred on concerns that a generation of children might end up 'falling behind' academically, with less attention paid to the idea that they might not be getting the quality of play they need.

Play is particularly important for younger children, as Oliver explains: 'It's a huge part of learning in early years education, and always, hopefully, will be.'

'Children learn through play. There has been some backlash against government changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Early Learning Goals for 2021 – with a focus on being "ready for Year One" and a concern from many that they may restrict play and creativity in the drive to focus on more formal learning.'

'But it doesn't mean that your practice as a teacher needs to be affected negatively. You can choose to "teach

to the test" above all else, or you can teach broad and creative learning. Children will still be able to excel in the measures and in many other areas too. Play remains at the core of learning in EYFS.'

Anita points out that play: 'boosts happiness, enhances confidence and supports communication,' and that it can take on many forms through imagination or role-play, helping children learn important skills like collaboration, negotiation, planning and creativity.

Oliver adds: 'I don't want it to sound like we are saying: "Don't do any work, just go and play." But if you can spend time with the child and engage in conversation if they're playing something, role-playing, or being creative, then that is child-led learning and what we would try to do in schools. It doesn't have to be as prescriptive as practising writing their letters, or learning a times-table.'

Oliver is also conscious that while many schools turned to virtual learning platforms for their pupils, some families faced difficulties in accessing those lessons if multiple children had to share one computer at home.

'At my school, we found a lot of parents were anxious about meeting an apparent deadline to complete work – sending work in to us at night as that was the only time a child could use their dad's phone, which was heart-breaking.'

'That was never what we wanted and I did have to put that message out to parents that none of the work was mandatory.'

Instead, the key is to spend time together on activities – whether they be physical or creative – and do them in discussion with the child, presenting them with positive choices that provide an opportunity for conversation and learning in that manner.



Read the original Birmingham Blog from Anita and Oliver:
<https://blog.bham.ac.uk/socialsciencesbirmingham/2020/06/18/all-work-and-no-play-why-children-need-play-during-covid-19/>



ENTREPRENEURS IN LOCKDOWN

Businesses have had a tough year, and the climate remains stressful and uncertain for many business owners and entrepreneurs. However, while some have struggled to stay afloat, others have been able to adapt their businesses to support the local community and continue to trade. Entrepreneurship offers an opportunity for recent graduates to learn vital work and business skills, creating opportunities that may not be available elsewhere. We caught up with some of our alumni who have been working hard during lockdown to set up and adapt their businesses to suit the changing times.



For brothers **Faisal Ahmed (BSc Business Management with Communications, 2014)** and **Suhail Ahmed (BSc Business Management with Communications, 2017)**, lockdown initially meant completely closing their online textile company Poundfabrics to ensure the safety of their staff, despite an increase in orders. Faisal describes the impact: 'We were busier than ever with orders but we couldn't dispatch anything. However, we were soon able to return safely to work, although it took us a while to catch up on the orders. There was a huge demand for polycotton for making NHS scrubs, and we were pleased to be able to supply some of this.'

He also has some advice for anyone looking to start up a business: 'It's not for everyone. Initially, we were working a lot of hours and it was very hard. You need to be able to tolerate a great deal of risk. Ultimately, it's very rewarding and I'm happy I took the step.'

TOP TIPS FROM OUR ALUMNI ENTREPRENEURS

- Don't be scared to fail. It's part of the journey – most successful business owners have at least one failure behind them
- Expect to work hard, especially initially when you are setting up
- Take every opportunity to network and talk about your business
- There is lots of help out there for start-ups, including advice, grants and mentoring

Although Birmingham graduates **Kieran Fitzgerald** and **Joshua Barley (both BSc Economics with Spanish, 2020)**, along with co-founder **Sonny Drinkwater**, only completed their studies this year, they wasted no time in setting up their business. Kieran explains: 'Snackcess was inspired by lockdown and remote working. We have created a business to help employers engage with their employees and support their wellbeing, by having personalised healthy snacks delivered to their door. We have needed to work a bit differently ourselves to set things up as we can't all physically be in the same place, but it's been really easy to get started, and there is loads of help available. We got a small grant and lots of advice from the University of Birmingham B-Enterprising team. It's a great time to start a new business, everyone is thinking differently and trying new things. We're young, we've got no overheads, and for us, it's the best time to do something new.'



Setting up an online business or website can also be a chance to connect with others and have some fun. University of Birmingham students and alumni also helped people cut their own hair, assess the safety of travelling to different countries and even work out how long their toilet paper would last!

If you have set up your own business and may be able to mentor newer graduates or students through the process, please let us know at alumnioffice@contacts.bham.ac.uk

If you would like free support with your business idea or freelancing, contact the B-Enterprising Team by either visiting intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/benterprising or emailing benterprising@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Advancing **THE BLACK STUDENT EXPERIENCE**



Tobi Adeyemi (MA International Relations and Diplomacy, 2019) has long been involved in community and charity work, volunteering for a youth organisation at home in Nigeria before coming to the UK to study her Masters Degree. Now, as Guild President, she talked to *Old Joe* about her intent to serve as a role model for students and play an active role in improving the academic and social experience of black students at the University of Birmingham.

Old Joe: Having grown up in Nigeria, how do you find life is different in the UK?

Tobi Adeyemi: Living in Nigeria, where the majority of the population is black, there's no discussion about race or identity. Everyone perceives themselves as the same. The first time I was in the UK and was referred to as a minority, I felt offended. I was not used to the term and had to adjust.

In terms of Black Lives Matter, in Nigeria we see what's happening elsewhere in the developed world, and how these issues are being spoken about. Often only a few people speak out as they feel detached from the issue. In the UK, people expected I should have an opinion as I'm black.

I've had to balance not trying to come off as an imposter on my own race. I do not 100% relate to how people are feeling because I haven't lived with those experiences, but I do understand it. And there is that constant conflict: are you actually black if you haven't experienced racism? Are you actually black if you haven't lived in a community where your race constantly determines your opportunities or your successes? So, it's been a bit difficult to navigate.

I've seen the way people get treated; I've seen the way close friends have experienced the feeling of being treated as less than human. I stand with those who have had negative experiences like racism and people who have campaigned for change. It's not right, and I lend my voice to that, rather than exclude myself from allowing people to think that I have had those exact experiences. However, I make sure to educate those around me to believe in the movement and also support those who are going through hard times.

OJ: What plans are you putting in place at the Guild to support the campaign and improve the student experience?

TA: Based on the National Student Survey scores, we noticed that there was a black attainment gap and that the experience and satisfaction levels of black students are significantly lower than those of white students.

We reached out to our black students for insight. Many said they did not feel a part of the wider UoB community, based on their background. Some mentioned how they didn't feel they could comfortably access the University wellbeing services, because they felt the staff delivering those services would not understand where they're from.

Most of the things that came out of that are about identity, the support services available and how they might seem to favour white students, therefore leaving room for high dissatisfaction levels among black students.

In terms of the Guild, we had feedback about our activities not being diverse enough. We've taken all of it on board and created a manifesto, which involved a range of action plans. We're looking at ways to decolonise the curriculum because students mentioned how the curriculum was too Eurocentric, didn't give room for other ideas and felt really narrow.

We are lobbying the University to review the wellbeing

support that they have on offer and proactively reviewing strategy to make the staff more racially diverse. We've asked for staff to receive inclusivity training and ensure they are properly trained on things like unconscious bias or micro-aggressions, because these are things that students face.

It's important the University understands these issues are real and that they pay attention to them.

At an academic level, we're working with equality, diversity and inclusion leads. We recently celebrated Black History Month and gave students the resources to come up with unique ideas to celebrate the black student community, engage with them and help them feel a lot more connected to the general community.

Finally, our Officer team is very keen on inclusion and diversity and everyone is trying within their respective remits to make change. It's not just been me driving that conversation; it's been an entire team project.

OJ: What are the top three things you would like to see change within the University?

TA: I think the first thing would be the decolonising of the curriculum and having the University review its current structures and ensuring that it caters to the need of students from minority ethnic groups and provides adequate support in line with what our priority campaign manifesto recommends. The UK is a multicultural nation, Birmingham is very, very diverse and the University of Birmingham has an amazing number of international students from different backgrounds.

Secondly, I think the University has to communicate more with the students and that could be done via the Guild as well. Collaborate with us to engage students, understand where they're coming from, understand the challenges and how to tackle them.

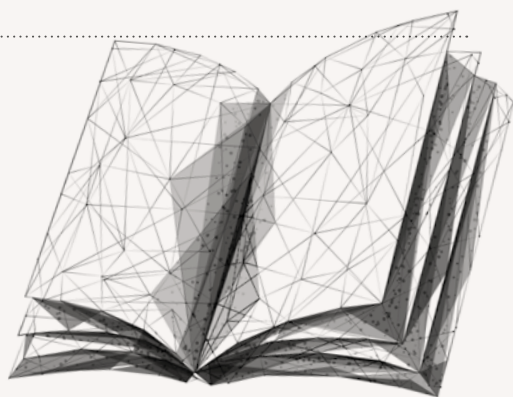
It's not enough to come up with ideas that people think will benefit the students, and making the students fit in. Bring them into that conversation, celebrate their backgrounds and their cultures and help them feel comfortable to thrive within the student community.

Finally, for the Guild, we need to improve representation of different backgrounds in student governance. That is a work in progress, but we must make it easy for students to understand what we do, how we operate, and how they can engage with us.

We're representing more than 30,000 students and the more they understand what we do, the more they engage with us, and the more they tell us what they want to see. I am grateful that my position as Guild President allows me to demonstrate properly the essence of the Students' Union and what we do, and make sure students see how they can be a part of a community that can drive change.

Read the Guild's Black Voices Manifesto:
www.guildofstudents.com/asset/News/6016/BV-Manifesto-3.pdf

Stories that connect us



If you're craving the power of storytelling, join our new online book club.

At this year's Global Alumni Gathering, which had to take place entirely online, our pilot book club was a big hit. So we have brought it back as a regular event, to enable alumni around the world to keep connecting over a good book.

The book club covers six books a year, based on recommendations from alumni that reflect our diversity. More than 300 alumni have already joined the dedicated Facebook group (search for Birmingham Alumni Book Club). You can choose to comment as you read using Facebook, and/or join a real time discussion on Zoom, led by a University academic with expertise in the subject who will bring the discussion to life. If you missed the October discussions, read on...

The first book: *My Name is Leon* by Kit de Waal

Nine-year-old Leon tries to take care of his baby brother while his mother struggles with her mental health. When the boys are taken into foster care, he wonders whether he will ever see his mother again and how to keep his brother with him.

Kit de Waal's debut novel is set in Birmingham, where she was born. It draws on 15 years' experience working in criminal and family law, plus her mother's time as a foster carer.

Kit explored her career as a writer and life as a Brummie with writer Paul McVeigh for this year's Birmingham Literature podcast series. As Guest Curator of the series, Kit worked with Birmingham graduate Shantel Edwards (BA English, 2009; MA English Literature, 2013; DPhil English Literature, 2019) to help curate a selection of this year's podcast episodes. In the podcast, Kit also discusses what happens to some of the secondary characters in *My Name is Leon*, who appear in her new book of short fiction, *Supporting Cast*. Listen to the podcast at www.birminghamliteraturefestival.org.



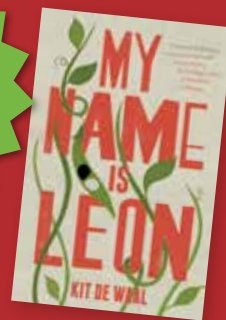
Shantel says: 'It has been a strange year to take up the role of Festival Director, but it has been really exciting to programme the first online Birmingham Literature Festival. We are really excited that people across the Midlands and beyond will now be able to join online workshops and get to know writers through our podcast series.'

Win a copy of Kit de Waal's books

For a chance to win *My Name is Leon* and *The Trick to Time*, answer this question:

Where was Kit de Waal born?

For your chance to win, send your answer, name and address to alumniconmunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk by 31 March 2021. See the Terms and Conditions on www.oldjoe.co.uk



**BIRMINGHAM
ACTION**

Support young people in care or who care for family members.

Many young people who have the potential to study at Birmingham find it difficult if they need to care for ill or disabled family members, or if they don't have parental support. Find out how you can help young people in need at www.birmingham.ac.uk/action/foreducation

Saving mothers' lives

Every six minutes, a mother in a developing country dies from losing blood while giving birth. With the right treatment, we can ensure more babies grow up with their mums.

Postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) is the leading cause of maternal deaths worldwide, mainly in developing countries. This autumn, researchers based at the University of Birmingham start a groundbreaking trial across 80 health facilities in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and Sri Lanka. The trial, called the E-MOTIVE study, aims to reduce severe bleeding after birth and ultimately reduce maternal deaths by 25%.

High-quality childbirth care from expert healthcare professionals is available for all mothers in the UK. Tried and tested methods for dealing with severe bleeding after birth are applied consistently if a new mother starts to bleed after childbirth. Yet for women in low- and middle-income countries, delayed detection and inconsistent treatment make postpartum haemorrhage highly dangerous. Early detection and effective treatment are limited and new interventions are urgently required. Developing a package of care to help diagnose bleeding early and treat women quickly can make the difference between life and death.

Spotlight on: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

- The organisation currently supports work in 138 countries around the globe
- It has given over \$50 billion since its inception
- The Foundation supports causes including women's health, tackling poverty and teaching farmers how to increase productivity sustainably, through to attempting to eradicate malaria and polio



The Facts

- Postpartum haemorrhage is the leading cause of maternal deaths worldwide, accounting for 27% of maternal deaths
- 99% of deaths resulting from this occur in developing countries
- Research shows that the baby of a mother who has died during childbirth has a less than 20% chance of surviving past their first month

Spot it fast and deliver the right treatment

The University of Birmingham, supported by a \$10.9 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, is leading a global effort to tackle bleeding after childbirth. Led by Professor Arri Coomarasamy (MBChB Medicine, 1995; MD Obstetrics and Gynaecology, 2004), a renowned Professor of Gynaecology and Reproductive Medicine and the Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Global Women's Health, and Dr Ioannis Gallos, Senior Clinical Lecturer, the University team will conduct the E-MOTIVE study, to detect and treat mothers suffering from postpartum haemorrhage.

The E-MOTIVE intervention consists of an early detection strategy for PPH based on objectively measuring blood loss, to ensure that a 'first response PPH treatment bundle' is promptly triggered for maximum benefit. The first response bundle includes uterine massage, specialist drugs (oxytocin and tranexamic acid) and fluids. This practical bundle of care is supported by a robust implementation strategy, focusing on simulation-based training, peer-assisted learning and local champions.

A bundle of care for all in need

The study aims to generate the necessary evidence to give healthcare practitioners and policy-makers the confidence to implement and scale-up the programme, moving us closer to having an implementable pathway to stopping these preventable deaths occurring.

Thank you to everyone who supported Arri's work on preventing miscarriages in 2017. To watch Arri talking about his work, visit www.oldjoe.co.uk

**BIRMINGHAM
ACTION**

You can support Professor Coomarasamy's work and help reduce maternal deaths. Contact Charitable Funding Partner, Jenny Prigg: giving@contacts.bham.ac.uk





FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

The UK education system can create and maintain inequalities that can last a lifetime. Black Caribbean boys are three times more likely to be excluded from school, and fewer ethnic minority students gain top 2:1 or first-class degrees and may struggle to find work afterwards. Birmingham's Centre for Research on Race and Education (CRRE) works to research and highlight the reasons for this, and change policy and practice to prevent this continuing.

The first of its kind in the UK, CRRE is the country's foremost academic centre dedicated to the study of racism and race inequality in education. The launch of the Centre in 2013 was groundbreaking in many ways; primarily for its focus on race discrimination within education, but also for encouraging collaboration, working closely with policy-makers, activists and the wider community. More recently, as well as looking at the wider student experience, researchers have also examined the experiences of staff within universities, where there continue to be few minority role models at senior levels both within academia and management.

The Director of the CRRE, Professor of Education and Social Justice Kalwant Bhopal MBE says: 'I'm proud to be the Director of an institution which has a remit to challenge. Sometimes we have to say things that can be uncomfortable, like highlighting the role of Higher Education in perpetuating inequality. But it is only by continuing to research and robustly evidence these injustices that we can begin to address them and create impact and lasting change.'

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD FOR A LEVELS

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on pupils' experiences of A levels. Working with the University of Nottingham, the CRRE is currently exploring how pupils feel their schools have dealt with the COVID-19 crisis, and the impact of having their exams cancelled. The subsequent debate over how grades were awarded led to teachers' predicted grades finally being used. However, with evidence suggesting students from minority ethnic backgrounds receive lower estimated grades than white students, there remain questions over how fair this system was. With surveys undertaken by students before and after results were given, this study will highlight the mental and academic impact of this policy and policy changes, and discover whether any groups have been unfairly disadvantaged.

TACKLING INEQUALITY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Practical steps forward at Birmingham to help close the attainment gap for students

- Targeting outreach activity for schools with high proportions of ethnic minority pupils to support access
- Employability support for black students such as work experience and mentoring
- Personalised interventions recognising the diversity within the ethnic minority student population
- Training for staff to help them identify specific challenges faced by minority groups
- Scholarships targeted at ethnic minority students
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassadors

The Race Equality Charter and inequality at Birmingham

We are committed to improving the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students at the University and have made real progress in terms of access, although there are still many challenges we face to improve student experience and academic progression. Some of the activities to support this include:

- With its implementation supported by Professor Bhopal, the University is one of only 15 in the UK to hold the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award
- Part of this process included putting a robust action plan in place to facilitate cultural change, improve the representation of ethnic minority staff, diversify the curriculum and library collections, and increase access and reduce the attainment gap for ethnic minority students
- We are working closely with the Guild of Students and Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff network to identify and support areas of inequality, and work together to support change
- We recognise that these are complex and wide reaching issues that will take resources and support at all levels to address

A MOMENT FOR CHANGE?

The team has been highlighting racial inequality for many years, before the death of George Floyd and the global Black Lives Matter movement this year brought racial injustice to the forefront nationally, both socially and politically. Professor Bhopal was surprised by the scale and global nature of protests this year, but understood the motivation behind it. 'Although the scale of the movement has taken everyone by surprise, I can't help but feel like we have been here before. After the publication of the Macpherson Report in 1999, which defined institutional racism for the first time, we thought things were going to change and that we had the momentum to make a difference. My worry is that the Black Lives Matter movement will be the same, and although institutions are happy to pay lip service to the movement, in six months' time everything will remain as it was before.'

Despite some frustration with the pace of change, Professor Bhopal is cautiously optimistic that this combination of robust research at the CRRE, practical action and popular support amplified this year can make a real difference. 'I see our role in the CRRE as continuing to highlight injustice and underachievement, and to use evidence to inform policy-makers and bring about lasting change.'

You can support the work of the CRRE to improve access to education or support scholarships for ethnic minority students. Contact Head of Philanthropy, Gary Bilham: giving@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Read more about the work of the CRRE at www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/crre

BIRMINGHAM ACTION



A force for change

One year ago, Birmingham resolved to make an even bigger difference in the world. Birmingham In Action draws together the expertise and passions of researchers, alumni, students and supporters to tackle some of the world's greatest challenges: education, cancer, youth mental health, protecting the environment and helping refugees.

The pandemic has made this work even more important. Young people have spent months unable to enter a classroom. Grief, fear and isolation have affected our mental health. Masks and plastic protection are adding to waste in landfills and rivers. Cancer patients have had their

treatments delayed. Refugees living in tents have been unable to social distance.

COVID-19 won't stop us helping others. This year alone, 9,286 supporters made a gift and 3,689 volunteered their time. Together, as a force for change, we can turn research into life-changing solutions and ensure young people are not held back by their circumstances.

Were you a part of the launch in October 2019?
See the full story at www.oldjoe.co.uk/article/birmingham-in-action-launch

Taking action on COVID-19: Birmingham In This Together



When the world faced a new challenge, we drew on our expertise in previous epidemics (including Ebola and Zika) to create real solutions quickly. We worked together to develop virus tests, make PPE, identify new drugs and help students facing unexpected hardship. Thank you to the more than 400 supporters whose generosity is helping develop better virus tests and preventing students who have lost their part-time jobs from having to drop out – read more on page 10.

One year on: what have you helped achieve?



A record number of 650+ students (many of whom are the first in their family to go to university) were supported to join the University

in 2020, through online summer schools, taster lectures, mentors, Access to Birmingham (A2B) scholarships and more. Read more on page 28.

Students who want to study engineering and physical sciences, but who have been disadvantaged in their education so far can now get dedicated support; money for accommodation, help towards living costs and no tuition fees. Applications are open for the first students.



We have been working with local schools to prevent bullying, one of the root causes of mental health issues for young people.

Teachers were trained to deliver KiVa, a research-based anti-bullying programme before the pandemic closed schools. We are collaborating with schools across the city to examine trauma and bullying during this period, to support teachers and parents and guide the return to school.

While waiting for schools to reopen, the team has been providing psychological support for frontline doctors and nurses treating patients acutely affected by COVID-19.



The Tessa Jowell BRAIN MATRIX trials are now live. The trials are named in honour of the late Baroness Tessa Jowell, who bravely

shared her diagnosis of a brain tumour on her 70th birthday. This first-of-its-kind clinical trial platform will enable researchers to provide patients and clinicians with a fully integrated diagnosis of their disease. The platform ultimately aims to improve both survival and quality of life. Read more on page 26.



We discovered new ways in which trees are protecting us from climate change. Trees less than 140 years old account for half the absorption

of carbon in young forests, and we have recommended six specific policy interventions where introducing vegetation in towns and cities can help reduce urban air pollution.

To understand the levels of plastic pollution in our rivers, we collected water samples from around the world, which we will analyse and compare.



We are making practical recommendations for how communities can help refugees, including improving language training,

facilitating economic activity, building social connections and ensuring access to family reunions. Watch Professor Jenny Phillimore introduce the report at www.oldjoe.co.uk

Three ways you can join in at www.birmingham.ac.uk/action



DONATE

A regular gift supports students throughout their studies or helps our researchers find solutions for the world's big challenges.



GIVE TIME

Become a mentor or offer a (virtual) internship to help students get vital experience, or share your expertise with our researchers.



SPREAD THE WORD

Tell us what education or research means to you, by email or on social media, using the hashtag **#BirminghamAction**



Rethinking the treatment of brain cancer

Around 30 people every day in the UK are diagnosed with brain cancer, and brain tumours kill more children and adults under the age of 40 than any other cancer*. No new treatments for brain cancer have been found in more than 15 years – and the University's Professor of Neurosurgery Colin Watts is intent on changing that.

**Brain Tumour Research*

‘We need to bring patients and research together to develop new strategies that get the right treatments to the right patient at the right time and address the multiple challenges of brain tumours.’

Professor Colin Watts

‘We don’t know much about brain cancer,’ says Professor Colin Watts. ‘We don’t know enough about the biology of the basic disease, and we don’t do enough to gather better quality data to develop new treatments.’

‘But the resources that we have available to us here in Birmingham put us in a great position to build the partnerships we need to develop that knowledge, and make a difference across the UK and the world.’

The straight-talking Chair of the new Brain Cancer Programme at the University, Colin is a practising neurosurgeon, currently putting together the Tessa Jowell BRAIN MATRIX trial – the largest trial in brain cancer in the UK – to develop better drugs and improve the quality of life for patients.

The problem

As he explains, studying brain tumours is a difficult process. It is the only cancer that grows in an electrically active environment, with the brain firing synapses millions of times a second. In addition, the tumours are hidden behind a protective barrier that sits around the brain, so they are particularly hard to diagnose and treat.

Current drugs are designed not to penetrate this barrier. For most cancers, this protects patients from the worst side-effects of treatments, but for patients with brain cancer, it means drugs can’t get to where they are needed.

Colin adds: ‘Models of brain cancer are poor imitations of the real thing so testing new treatments is particularly challenging.’

‘We also have a lack of adaptive clinical trial frameworks. When you start a patient on a treatment and their cancer starts to become resistant or the treatment starts to fail, we need to be in an environment where we can quickly shift them onto something else.’

‘Critical to doing that is the early recognition and detection of treatment failure. But we don’t have any models to capture that. It’s an incredibly challenging area to work in.’

What can be done better?

Colin emphasises that the key to winning the battle against brain cancer lies in collaboration. He adds: 'We need to bring patients and research together to develop new strategies that get the right treatments to the right patient at the right time and address the multiple challenges brain tumours present.'

That means building a better understanding of how to develop drugs. To do that, scientists need patients taking part in adaptive clinical trials while other teams work on the creation of new drugs.

'We're interested in understanding the biology of brain cancer,' he says, 'by developing the patient as a model of their own disease.'

An essential part of the strategy will be integrating clinical, imaging and biological data, according to Colin. His team has been working on what he calls 'the next generation of clinical trials' that will do just that by capturing every patient with brain cancer undergoing surgery.

Currently only about five per cent of patients would be expected to get on to a trial, with the results extrapolated to the remaining 95 per cent. In BRAIN MATRIX, the aim is to get every patient into a trial.

Why Birmingham can make a difference

While the hurdles are sizeable, Colin feels that the University is ideally placed to become a global leader in the research and treatment of brain tumours.

He explains: 'If we're going to do something that is going to have a major strategic impact, nationally and globally, it's going to be a partnership of the resources that we have available to us both locally in Birmingham, nationally in the UK, and internationally through our collaborative partners around the world.'

'We have Birmingham Health Partners; we have one of the biggest NHS Trusts across the road and we are a major Russell Group University. We can bring that infrastructure together.'

There's a lot of grand ambition to make changes for the better. This is about realising some of that ambition for patients and their loved ones.

Professor Colin Watts

The limitations of current treatments

1. Patient is brought to hospital following a seizure or stroke-like illness.



3. Treatment is radiotherapy, and one of two drugs: temozolomide (TMZ), or PCV (procarbazine, lomustine and vincristine).



5. If patient had good first response to treatment, best available subsequent option is the same drug ('re-challenge with temozolomide').

2. Tissue is taken and analysed. A very crude set of molecular markers is used to place patients into different categories for prognosis and treatment.



4. Disease may progress in some cancers, eg, glioblastoma, most common in adults. Some of these patients get worse within weeks.



**BIRMINGHAM
ACTION**

You can support the work of Professor Watts and help develop new treatments for brain tumours. Go to www.birmingham.ac.uk/action/braincancer or contact Gary Bilham at giving@contacts.bham.ac.uk





Student disadvantage **amplified by COVID-19**

Imagine you've lost your part-time job, which enabled you to pay your term-time rent. Perhaps you are a young carer, and you can't leave home because the parent you are supporting has been shielding. Or one of your parents was furloughed and then made redundant, and won't be able to help you financially if you choose to go to university.

These are the very real issues faced by some of our current and potential students, whose dreams may be shattered by not being able to attend university or complete their studies.

There are many ways students are being supported through the current crisis. This includes helping those with all the potential and dedication of their peers, who simply don't have the financial or practical support needed to get to university, and helping those hit by unexpected hardship to make sure they can complete their studies.

Supporting the brightest to succeed

The University has a strong tradition of helping the most able students to access education, whatever their situation. Our Pathways to Birmingham programme has a number of distinctive offerings, which all provide 17- and 18-year-old students with an insight into university study and graduate employability, support with the university application process and enable successful transition to higher education.

One of the pathways is the popular Access to Birmingham programme, which supports students who have little or no experience of higher education to discover what university involves. It is a truly diverse scheme, with a long history of welcoming students with a wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds to campus. Always popular, demand has been higher than ever this year, and as the economic instability continues, the need for this life-changing scheme continues to grow.

Helping those most in need

This year, an unprecedented number of students have needed urgent financial assistance from the Student Hardship Fund, generously supported by alumni and community supporters including Santander. Three times as many applications for help as in previous years were received, and grants were available for between £200

and £2,500. Two-thirds of students are reliant on part-time jobs in cafes, pubs and shops that may have shut over lockdown, and many are reliant on support from parents who may no longer be in a position to give. A huge thank you to more than 400 alumni and friends who responded to our crisis appeal; your generous contributions made a huge difference.

With applications to the Pathways to Birmingham programme also higher than ever before, COVID-19 has had an enormous impact on students, with the biggest impact on those most vulnerable. With uncertainty and change likely to remain for students for some time to come, this support is needed now more than ever.

What is Access to Birmingham?

- Access to Birmingham (A2B) is part of the Pathways to Birmingham scheme, for disadvantaged students who may be the first in their family to go university, have been in care, from a low-income household, are living with a disability, and more.
- Now in its 20th year, there have been 4,226 A2B entrants since the scheme began – every student is supported by donations from alumni and friends of the University.
- Of all students who applied to the Pathways to Birmingham programme, 21% had no quiet place to work, 3.1% had no regular access to the internet, 15.4% are caring for siblings and 6.4% are caring for other relatives.
- Scholars receive an annual scholarship of £1,500 and/or £1,000 bursary.
- This year has seen the biggest ever number of applicants, with alumni and friends supporting 1,200 students on a Pathways to Birmingham programme, including 900 on A2B. Congratulations to our newest A2B and Pathways students for overcoming a tough year and securing their place with us!



From school to dream career



First-year student,
Elizabeth

“ Before COVID-19 came, I was working hard to put my dreams into action. The support I received from the Pathways programme has helped me immensely especially because my parents didn't go to university. When I got the email to say they could offer me a place I was in denial, in shock, over the moon. My parents were euphoric I'd got into medical school. ”

Elizabeth Ung, first-year student, Medicine and Surgery



Third-year student, Leah

“ Living in a single parent household and studying at a comprehensive school meant initially, I didn't think that university was an option. I was worried about the cost and also about having to commute to study and possibly missing out on the university experience. The bursary provided by the Access to Birmingham programme gave me the confidence and financial security to make a university education a reality for me. I have not only managed to attend this prestigious University, but also to make the most of the Birmingham experience, joining sports and Community Challenge societies and enabling me to volunteer in and around the city. ”

Leah Booth, third-year student, Business Management and A2B Scholar



Graduate Jason

“ The Student Support Fund has completely saved me. It's unbelievable how much difference it has made to my student experience and mental health. Thank you again. ”

Student Support fund recipient

Jason Shiu (LLB, 2016) explains the huge impact gaining a place on the A2B scheme had on his life:

“ I was the first in my family to go to university and now I'm living in Canary Wharf and working in the finance industry. Everything I am now indirectly relates to my getting on the A2B scheme – it was my platform to get to university, and gave me confidence to express myself better, to make friends from around the world, move away from my home city and ultimately get the job I'm in now. ”

Hear more from our students at
www.oldjoe.co.uk

**BIRMINGHAM
ACTION**

Thank you to everyone who donated to support students through our e-appeal in October. Find out more about how to help support students through a gift or by becoming a mentor at www.birmingham.ac.uk/action

How well do you know the University of Birmingham?

Test your knowledge with our campus quiz!



1. Who was the first royal visitor to the University in July 1909, who attended a ceremony to mark the official opening of the Aston Webb buildings?



2. The basement floor of the Guild of Students building was equipped with what when it opened in 1930, for use by students living in private lodgings?



3. How many University of Birmingham students and alumni competed at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in 2018?



4. In what decade was a Malting and Brewing course established at the University's predecessor institution, Mason Science College?

Bonus emoji round

How well do you know your University in emojis? During lockdown, emoji quizzes became really popular, so we joined in with the fun and created our very own University of Birmingham-themed quiz. We've included a few to pique your interest here, while the rest can be found at www.oldjoe.co.uk



Image: @brumhaus

Competition time

For your chance to win a signed University of Birmingham Brumhaus print, send your name, address and answer to the final question by 31 March to alumniconnunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Terms and conditions are available on our website.

Fill in the blank:

Students and staff volunteering for duty during _____ as part of the University Home Guard might find themselves undertaking observation duty from the top of the clock tower – watching for enemy activity and reporting fires or explosions from air raids.



Images 1, 2 and 4: Cadbury Research Library, University of Birmingham; Image 3: supplied by Getty Images, British Athletics and UB Sport

Emojis
Tennis Courts / The Mermaid / Winterbourne House and Gardens / The Vale

the England women's hockey team. 4. 1890s
1990s. 3. 24; six students and 18 alumni – a whopping six of whom were part of that didn't have bathrooms. The baths were still in the Guild building in the early
used by students living in private lodgings

Answers

YOUR STORIES

Where did your Birmingham education take you? Share your updates with your fellow alumni by emailing alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk or tweet us @birminghamalum using #wearebrumalum



1966

CHARLES HARRIS QC (LLB, 1966)

Birmingham's LLB took me, via the Bar, to become England's longest-serving civil specialist Judge, with claims from medical negligence to the sale of the Ritz. *Trial and Error* (2020) describes a calamity of complexity – English law is now too difficult to understand and too costly to use. But the book is also a light-hearted memoir: Black Country childhood, some education, standing for Parliament, Indian ballooning, African adventure, Alpine and Highland sport, fireworks and family life in Oxfordshire.



1989

LIZA RAMRAYKA (BA English and French, 1989)

After graduation, a journalism postgraduate course in London led to positions as reporter, editor and commissioning editor in the UK, most notably with *The Guardian* and *The Times*. I specialise in social justice stories, influencing research into migration, women's issues and housing insecurity. Now in San Francisco, I cover social justice stories for *The New York Times*, *HuffPost* and more. I'm also a journalism mentor and industry awards judge.



1999, 2004

MAISIE CHAN (BA American and Canadian Studies, 1999; MPhil American Literature and Film, 2004)

Growing up, I had only ever read one British novel featuring Chinese people. I became a writer to change that. There are very few British-Chinese creatives creating work in the mainstream media or publishing. My books for children range from *Stories From Around the World* to reading books for primary schools. Read my blog at www.maisiechan.com



2013

KAYLA HERBERT (English, 2013)

Looking for your next book? My debut young adult novel, *The Book of Moons*, has made it onto multiple Amazon bestseller lists in Canada. Set in Ireland in the 1970s, it follows the story of 16-year-old Kathy, who is on the run from a convent orphanage and finds herself in a camp of Irish Travellers. It was a pleasure to research and write. It means a lot to share this with the University of Birmingham community.

Win books by alumni

To win Kayla Herbert's *The Book of Moons*, Maisie Chan's *Stories From Around the World* and Charles Harris's *Trial and Error*, answer this question:

Which hotel sale did Charles Harris offer legal advice on?

Email your name, address and answer to alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk by 31 March 2021. Terms and conditions are available on our website.

WIN



Volunteering for change: global rights for women

Growing up in a household led by a single mother within Tanzania's traditionally patriarchal society led Eluka Chelu Kibona (MA International Development, 2008) to question the idea of male authority from an early age. Years later, the campaigner and activist is still asking challenging questions and using her platform as a Ford Global Fellow to fight for change.

Eluka can barely remember a time when she wasn't aware of a male-dominated society, with access to resources, education and credit controlled by men. She challenges this daily through her role with the Department for International Development (DFID), and her voluntary work coordinating Voices of Young Women, a feminist forum that aims to give agency to young women, challenging traditional gender norms and economic disparity. It was the drive and passion to right these injustices that led her to study at Birmingham.

TIME IN BIRMINGHAM

Eluka recalls her time in Birmingham with great fondness: 'The Development Department had a great international reputation and I'd heard about their work with governments and countries around the world. I loved the energy there, and it really felt like home with the mix of different cultures and people. I tried to experience everything Birmingham had to offer, I loved the curry and the people and made lifelong friendships. I would recommend it to everyone. One day I hope my children will go to the University of Birmingham.'

Describing her work to readdress the gender imbalance as a constant 'itch', she is keen to stress that it's not just something which is seen in Africa, citing the recent #MeToo movement as an example of women questioning

the power relationship, although within a very different economic context.

FORD GLOBAL FELLOWSHIP

As a Ford Global Fellow, Eluka is part of the inaugural cohort of 24 social justice leaders who have been selected to participate in the Ford Foundation's new Global Fellowship programme, which will help accelerate the impact of their work. She adds: 'Being one voice can sometimes feel draining. This is a great opportunity to hear from others what makes their movements work, and what makes change happen.' So it's easy to understand the appeal of connecting with such a powerful network from around the world, swapping ideas, collaborating and learning from each other.

CHANGE STARTS AT HOME

Within her own home, Eluka is determined that her son is brought up to see gender roles very differently: making sure he knows how to cook and clean and doesn't think certain jobs are 'for women'. As she concludes: 'I'm not afraid to speak my mind and to challenge. For me, silence is complicity.'



“I started volunteering for change while I was in Birmingham – LGBTQ+ issues and women’s rights, against sweatshops and climate change. When I got back home, I didn’t have a job so I continued to volunteer. It helped me build networks and meet people working on the same issues as me. It took a while, but now I have a job in a field I’m passionate about, and I continue to volunteer in my spare time.”

“I’m not afraid to speak my mind and to challenge. For me, silence is complicity.”



12 TO WATCH: FIVE YEARS ON

Birmingham's 300,000th graduate, Shenaid Tapper, crossed the stage in 2015. Five years on, catch up with her and some of her fellow graduates from the Class of 2015's 12 to Watch.



Providing art therapy for children

SHENAIID TAPPER (BSc Planning and Economics, 2015)

'The summer after graduating I travelled around Central America before starting my graduate job. I have mostly worked in change management and currently work at the Bank of England. Right now, I am project managing a piece of work to explore how to digitalise the way we write and implement regulatory policy. At University, I loved volunteering and I was keen to continue it. I am a trustee of the Araba Scott Children's Foundation, which aims to improve the lives of children in Jamaica through art, education and culture. I have supported the build of our first safe haven in Jamaica, implemented art therapy sessions and organised fundraising events. My biggest challenge was realising that my first graduate job was not right for me. A lot of importance is placed on just getting that first job, but it is even more important to ensure the role aligns with your values. Although it was hard giving up a job at a great company, I learnt to play to my strengths and find purpose in what I'm achieving.'

Supporting patients and being true to myself

JOSEPH ALDERMAN (Intercalated BMedSc, 2014; MBChB Medicine, 2015)

'I'm almost half-way through my postgraduate medical training as an anaesthetist and intensive care doctor. I work at the QE Hospital, just a stone's throw from the Medical School. Alongside my clinical work, I've been appointed as a medical researcher. My research is focused on critically ill patients – though this has been on hold for the last few months as I've been responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Outside of work, I've taken up cycling and my partner and I have bought a house where we live with our three-legged cat. My proudest achievement since leaving University was coming out as gay back in 2016. Even in today's enlightened times, it was hugely challenging – but doing so has enabled me to live happily and authentically. The best advice I've been given is to carry on working hard even after leaving university. Continuing to learn takes a lot of effort when you're working full time, but it'll put you in a much better position later in your career.'

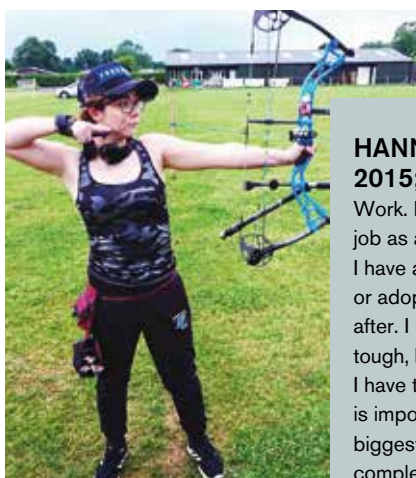


Read more from our 12 to Watch at www.oldjoe.co.uk We'd love to know what you went on to do after graduation! Share what you are up to now with [#wearebrumalum](https://twitter.com/wearebrumalum) or email alumnicommunications@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Shaping environmental policy

EDWARD FITTER (BSc Biochemistry, 2015)

'In my first year after graduating, I worked at a restaurant, did an internship at Aston Martin and spent a couple of months exploring Canada and Thailand. I then started a graduate job in local government and gained a diploma in Leadership and Management. In 2017, I started working for the Conservative Party. Last year, I was elected as a councillor to the Stratford-upon-Avon District Council. I am very busy balancing this on top of a full-time job, but I love working for my community and it's very rewarding to bring my ideas into reality. Through my Biochemistry degree, I picked up a strong interest in the environment and conservation. As a councillor, I'm working hard to ensure that the decisions and policies we determine consider the local environment. It is my aspiration that Stratford-upon-Avon will be a cleaner and greener place to live and work when I finish my term.'



Helping children find a home

HANNAH BEVINGTON (BA Childhood, Culture and Education, 2015; MA Social Work, 2017)

'After I graduated, I gained an MA in Social Work. My proudest achievement in the last five years has been working in my dream job as a social worker, making a difference to the lives of children and young people. I have achieved permanency for many children through Special Guardianship Orders or adoption and I support children and young people who are fostered and looked after. I love the variety and the challenge that every day brings and, whilst it can be tough, I wouldn't want to be anywhere else. I've just bought my first home in Shropshire. I have travelled quite a bit and gained a few new hobbies (such as archery) which is important with such a stressful job to help maintain a good work life balance! My biggest challenge has been learning and growing as a practitioner working within the complex political landscape that has been created by years of austerity and funding cuts to public services. COVID-19 provided some fresh new challenges but I'm proud of the way myself and colleagues have been able to adapt.'

Living in a new country

MATTHEW HARRISON (BSc Physics with International Study, 2015)

'After graduating, I returned to Toulouse, France, where I had spent my year abroad. I taught English as a foreign language, worked at a British pub and started a new degree in Applied Foreign Languages with Chinese. I also helped to welcome Erasmus students from Birmingham. My degree took me on another year abroad, this time to Chongqing, China. A mutual friend put me in touch with an alumnus who lived there and he welcomed me into his ex-pat friendship group! Unfortunately, in mid-February, I had to return home and attend classes online due to the pandemic. My goal now is to find a way back to China to continue that adventure. My proudest achievements since graduating are moving abroad, integrating into the local way of life, finding a job that I love and making the decision to start a new degree, which forced me to push the boundaries of my comfort zone in every direction. Through all of this, I've grown enormously as a person, building on the foundation of independence and responsibility which I developed at University.'



JOIN US **ONLINE** FOR YOUR BIRMINGHAM ALUMNI EVENTS

Now there are even more exclusive opportunities for Birmingham's busy alumni to connect to their University and global network. Online events enable you to access expert insights from world-class research and interact with each other from anywhere around the world, from the comfort of your own home.

BRINGING BIRMINGHAM TO YOU

In these monthly topical panel discussions, academics discuss their research in an informal and accessible way.



BIRMINGHAM ALUMNI BOOK CLUB

Join the discussion on Facebook (Birmingham Alumni Book Club) or a live online meeting led by an academic, to discuss some great reads.



IN CONVERSATION

An in-depth look at the work of our leading academics, who are examining the effects of the pandemic on cancer research, mental health and more.



OR HOST YOUR OWN REUNION

Although physical meet ups may not be possible for a while, virtual reunions can be a great opportunity to reconnect and reminisce with your old classmates and friends. Contact the Events Team by emailing alumnierevents@contacts.bham.ac.uk for more information on how to set one up.

CAREERS AND COFFEE

Recent graduates meet with alumni mentors for an informal careers chat.



Find out more at www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumnierevents and update your email address to get the latest invitations at www.birmingham.ac.uk/alumni-update
We hope to see you at a virtual event soon!



www.birmingham.ac.uk
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