This year’s Annual Advisory Board Guest Lecture was held in our newly refurbished University House. To highlight and expand upon the issues we are exploring in our growing body of research in Responsible Business and Work Inclusivity, we invited Jane Cordell, one of the UK’s leading professional experts on deafness and disability issues, to give the address: Positive defiance: a deaf woman’s social enterprise journey.

Jane started by asking the audience to consider what it feels like not to fit in… And posed an enlightening response of her own: “what a liberating asset it can be, used right, because your experience is different, your perspective is different; you are actually forced to be creative; to come up with new ideas – what an asset to a workplace”. She went on to explain her experience of going deaf and how it meant the devastating loss of music which had been her life since she was seven, having then gone on to play at a high level in the Cambridge Academy of Music. She described this as the worst part of becoming deaf, followed closely by the loss of social interaction – “the jokes that keep you going”.

“But what was to keep me going was work – I never ever considered not working; I couldn’t see any other way.”

Jane then explored with the audience how they might go beyond “tick-box” exercises to achieve diversity, and actually think and recruit more broadly to unearth talent in all employees.

“Thinking about ‘adding’ or increasing diversity is the wrong way round. To me it is about uncovering it – going to people and asking them what their strengths are. Everyone will always have astonishing insights if you keep listening, keep quiet and keep asking good questions.”

Tying this in with responsible business practice, which in turn can lead to greater productivity, Jane quoted Professor Ian Thomson – Director of the Lloyds Banking Group Centre for Responsible Business (at Birmingham Business School):

“Greater inclusivity is a critical dimension of a responsible sustainable business. Non-inclusivity is detrimental to business, business reputation, social legitimacy and its future development.”

The talk attracted many questions from the audience of Advisory Board members, students and businesses, and insightful reflections from members of the audience living with deafness themselves. The evening ended with a warm vote of thanks from Lord Karan Bilimoria.
The Board meeting itself provided the opportunity for the Advisory Board to meet the Business School’s new Dean Professor Cathy Cassell, who laid out her vision to make the Business School a place where Faculty are able to thrive and do their best work.

Rebecca Riley, Professor Ian Thomson, Professor Joanne Duberley and Dr Holly Birkett then explained how we are now building the reputation of the School in the following areas, through which we plan to channel and create pathways to position, disseminate and showcase our research output across the School:

i. **Regional Economic Development**
This work not only has a huge impact in our region, including the Annual production of the Birmingham Economic Report with Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, but is also leading to research world-wide in transforming and remodelling city regions.
[https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/city-redi/index.aspx](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/city-redi/index.aspx)

ii. **Responsible Business**
Following the Annual Advisory Board address that he gave here last year, the Lloyds Bank CEO António Horta Osório agreed a £2.5 million investment to set up the Lloyds Banking Group Centre for Responsible Business.
[https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/responsible-business/index.aspx](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/schools/business/research/responsible-business/index.aspx)

iii. **Work Inclusivity**
A significant group of our academics are coming together to share and build on research synergies in this area, tying-in our established expertise in ethnic minority enterprise, and developing a large research presence in this field which is becoming ever more critical in business for reputation and success.
Professor Cathy Cassell is carrying out work with Marks and Spencer in this field:

The Board was thanked for their ongoing contribution, with the following singled out for particular praise: Marc Stone for the opportunity to tender for a Research/Consultancy Commission (which we secured bringing income into the School), Sarindar Sahota for the regional links he’s delivered, and Jane Lodge for the seven year delivery of the Birmingham MBA Deloitte Consultancy Challenge.

The School then reached out to the Board for support in bringing together a research impact advisory panel in the spring, and asked for their input into a leadership review the School is delivering for Andy Street (West Midlands Combined Authority Mayor), and for guidance with our International Strategy. It was agreed that the Board members would liaise accordingly with the School to identify who would assist in each area, and then collectively review progress at the July meeting.