



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

College of
Social Sciences

Driving social change for a fairer and more sustainable world

College of Social Sciences
2030 Strategy

We transform
We activate
[birmingham.ac.uk](https://www.birmingham.ac.uk)

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UNIVERSITY OF
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Foreword

The enduring role of social science is to understand and improve how people live and experience their lives. This is mission critical if we are to tackle the global challenges of the twenty-first century, including environmental emergencies, health and education inequalities, geopolitical conflict, threats to democracy, generative AI and digital technologies, and population displacement.

Research and education in the College of Social Sciences (CoSS) address these challenges and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) head-on by producing world-class, evidence-based, data-driven policy recommendations – bringing the opportunity to create real-world impact and change. Rooted in the city of Birmingham – the United Kingdom's second city with a young and superdiverse population – and with a campus in Dubai, the College is committed to driving social change for a fairer and more sustainable world for all.

In this document, we set out the College's vision and strategy to 2030, reflecting the University's core values – ambition, openness, collaboration, innovation, and responsibility. The outcome of a year-long strategy development process, it has been co-created by academic and professional services staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and external end-users of our work. It is underpinned by an implementation plan, which outlines the activity and milestones we are working toward across the College to ensure that our vision is realised. Whether you are a prospective student, staff member, or stakeholder, we look forward to shaping the future of social sciences together.

CoSS College Board

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Vision

Inspired by the University of Birmingham's founding vision as the original 'red brick' civic University with a social mission, CoSS has always combined academic rigour with practitioner relevance ever since our first degrees were launched in the 1900s.

Today the University's 2030 Strategic Framework reimagines this mission to address social, economic, and environmental sustainability in a global context. With its focus on understanding human behaviour and identifying workable policy solutions, social science is pivotal to this mission. As the largest of the University's Colleges, CoSS has a vital role to play in supporting our collective global top 50 ambition.

Based across our world-class campuses in Birmingham and Dubai, CoSS is a global, diverse, and inclusive community of currently more than 12,500 students, 900 academics, and 300 professional services staff. Our staff and students benefit from being in communities with rich cultures and contribute to the regional and global workforce and economy. Our four schools – Business, Education, Government, and Social Policy and Society – are in the vanguard of innovative and impactful research and teaching across social science.

CoSS' intellectual heritage – including leading figures such as Stuart Hall – has long identified and addressed the most pressing and contested questions. We combine disciplinary excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration within and beyond the College, and methodological innovation – including qualitative, quantitative, and computational approaches – to address real world problems and upskill our students as responsible global citizens and highly employable graduates.

By 2030, the College will be larger, more diverse in terms of student and staff recruitment, increasingly orientated towards challenge-led research and skills-focused education, better placed to leverage digital technology, big data, and AI, and recognised globally as a thought-leader in shaping the future of social sciences.

Our vision for social sciences at Birmingham builds on our unique strengths relating to place, practice, policy, and people:



Place

To address the research needs and skill gaps of the cities in which we are located – with their young, superdiverse, and often disadvantaged populations – by driving social change for a fairer and more sustainable society.



Policy

To engage closely with governments, businesses, and the third sector to co-produce accessible, evidence-based, data-driven policy recommendations that support economic growth and improve lives.



Practice

To promote public service, practitioner involvement, and regional engagement across all our activities to both inform our research and education and ensure its continued relevance, innovation, and impact.



People

To embed the lived experience of individuals and communities into data collection and analysis and make our research more accessible to the public via storytelling. We will also create an open, inclusive, and transformative destination of choice globally where you are empowered to accelerate your career.





Strategic principles

To realise this vision and support our global top 50 ambition, we will prioritise the following strategic principles:

1. Strengthen disciplinary excellence and develop a distinctive interdisciplinary approach for social sciences at Birmingham that addresses the UN SDGs;
2. Offer an outstanding global education for all students as co-producers of knowledge with academics;
3. Cultivate an ambitious, supportive, and inclusive research culture that empowers colleagues to realise their full potential in output and impact;
4. Extend the regional, national, and global reach, visibility, and reputation of our research and education;
5. Embed digital technology and utilise big data, computational methods, and ethical use of generative AI to support the research lifecycle and learning environment;
6. Enable staff and students across the College to feel included and thrive, creating positive working/learning cultures and drawing on our expertise in social diversity, equity, and belonging to lead by example;
7. Secure a financially viable future that supports the University's 2030 strategic ambition by maximising and diversifying income sources, and utilise our resources responsibly and in alignment with our strategy;
8. Achieve stronger global student intakes, higher global rankings, and greater levels of investment;
9. Position CoSS as a regional convenor and national leader in social science policy and impact;
10. Strengthen engagement with regional, national, and international end-users of our research and education across business, local/national government, education, health, social care sectors, NGOs, and overseas governments.

Research

We will consolidate the College's position as a destination of choice for leading social scientists from across the world and provide a research environment that supports everyone to achieve their full potential.

This strategy supports our ambition for global research excellence and income growth trajectory, building on our civic commitment. We are committed to sustainable research design and practice together with a strong mission to drive social change for a fairer world as set out in the University's Research Challenge Themes.

1. Embed disciplinary excellence and innovation to support REF 2029 ambitions

- Develop our staff and ensure REF infrastructure is in place to continue attracting the best staff at all levels. This includes establishing new world-leading research centres in intellectual disability and implementation sciences.
- Pursue external opportunities that reflect the quality of research and impact in the College, including Doctoral Landscape Awards and research centre funding.

2. Prioritise collaboration and interdisciplinarity to support challenge-led research and income growth

- Organise our research into interdisciplinary themes to maximise investment, collaboration and growth, and facilitate better access to interdisciplinary opportunities.

Priority themes include: education, health, and social care; responsible business, economic growth, and social inequality; international security, peace, and resilience; and public policy, data, and AI.

3. Support a wide range of impact through inclusive research and policy engagement

- Develop and support policy leadership and influence at regional, national, and international levels, building on existing initiatives including: City-Region Economic Development Institute (City-REDI); Governance and Social Development Resource Centre and United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research; UK Research and Innovation Parliamentary Thematic Research Leads; and leading research agendas in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority, Birmingham City Council, Ministry of Education, NHS, Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office, and United Nations.

4. Support the development of researchers and professional staff at all career stages through training and capacity building

- Build a supportive and inclusive research culture through a range of initiatives such as enhanced support for applicants to major fellowship schemes including the European Research Council and Future Leaders Fellowships. We will champion the Access to Success Pathways for Inclusive Research Excellence (ASPIRE) programme in highlighting inclusive research practice and building leadership capacity.
- Embed our community of postgraduate researchers and early career researchers in the College within key research initiatives, supporting their growth by implementing the Researcher Development Concordat and helping them achieve excellence and independence.

5. Ensure a secure and thriving environment through research data management and infrastructure

- Invest in future-proofed research infrastructure by bidding for external funding from a range of sources including Horizon, Economic and Social Research Council, National Institute for Health and Care Research, and the Office for National Statistics, working in partnership with other institutions across the region.
- Develop a strong institutional identity for world-class social science methodology, reaching social scientists across the University to enable access to state-of-the-art research infrastructure and software and training.



Professor Nando Sigona, Director of the Institute for Research into International Migration and Superdiversity. Find out more about the Institute:





Professor Karen Guldberg, Head of the School of Education and Professor of Autism Studies. Find out more about our research into autism:



Research quality



45%

of our business and management research rated world leading



41%

of our politics and international studies research rated world leading



8th

in the UK for our research in social work and social policy



10th

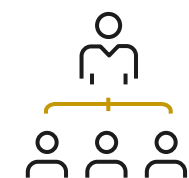
in the UK for our research in development studies



Joint 3rd

in the UK for our research in education

Staff profile



900+

academic staff



32

Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences

Research funding



c. £50m

in external research awards over the last 3 years

All data correct as of May 2025

Education

Across our Edgbaston and Dubai campuses and our global community of students, the College will provide an outstanding student experience and education that prepares students for future success, supports the evolving needs of society, and leads to innovative education delivery.

Building on our expertise across the social sciences and excellence in pedagogy, our local and international learning environments will provide excellent standards of research-intensive learning.

1. **Create a teaching portfolio that addresses modern-day societal challenges and enhances employability outcomes**
 - Introduce new cross-disciplinary programmes that showcase our vision for the social sciences. The first stage will be launching BSc Social Sciences and BA Politics, Philosophy and Economics, with plans for programmes in AI, data science, and sustainable development.
 - Draw on our key stakeholders - our internationally diverse student body, alumni and employers - to co-produce a demand and impact driven portfolio that embeds entrepreneurship and digital literacy, and champions equity, diversity and belonging (EDB), and social and environmental responsibility.
 - Integrate an understanding of sustainability across our programmes and engage with UN SDGs, linking teaching and learning outcomes to social, economic, and environmental sustainability.
 - Embed personal skills across our curricula and enhance placement opportunities and links with alumni and employers. We will offer innovative, authentic assessments with real-world learning opportunities that are accessible to all students, preparing them for careers as leaders across all sectors.
2. **Offer a varied, impactful, and inclusive student experience**
 - Ensure that our students' time at Birmingham is enriching academically and personally and enables them to achieve their full potential. This will be reflected in a reduction in awarding gaps, sector-leading employability, and improved performance in the National Student Survey, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.
 - Adapt pedagogy for part-time students and those balancing work and study, and prioritise student wellbeing, particularly in response to the pressures of modern education, the cost of living, and digital divides.
3. **Unite education and research, ensuring a research-intensive teaching and learning environment**
 - Ensure our education strategy is underpinned by the latest knowledge and delivered by leading experts and prioritise the development of research skills at all levels of study.
 - Provide opportunities to study across disciplines, with more flexible and personalised learning and increased practitioner engagement and impact-led teaching.
 - Involve students in shaping their learning journey, with opportunities to co-create problem-driven learning experiences.
4. **Provide an education that reflects the Birmingham commitment to civic engagement**
 - Place civic engagement prominently in our curriculum to foster a commitment to social and environmental responsibility among our students, and encourage connections with the city of Birmingham and industry.
 - Reimagine Birmingham's civic mission in a global context by establishing better links between our Edgbaston and Dubai campuses.
5. **Enhance our online education offering and develop students that are equipped to make ethical use of digital tools**
 - Embed new technologies across our curricula, and support students to use digital and generative AI tools effectively and ethically in their learning experience, ensuring students can use and evaluate new and emerging technologies.
 - Support academics to deliver innovative modules and programmes across the College and enhance the student learning experience through provision and delivery of digital resources.
6. **Foster a supportive teaching community**
 - Enable colleagues to showcase their pedagogical innovations internally and externally, recognising and rewarding outstanding teaching and contributions to education leadership, as well as work that empowers our students to develop graduate attributes.

Alice Peddie, Education and Sociology graduate and primary school teacher. Read more about Alice's journey:





MBA students at a London networking event.
Find out more about the MBA at Birmingham:



Programmes



c.160

programmes across four delivery locations
and online



c.50

undergraduate programmes across
three delivery locations



100+

PGT programmes across four delivery
locations and online



27

UG and PG taught programmes in Dubai



7

UG and PG taught programmes in Singapore

All data correct as of May 2025

QS headline



Five of our subjects ranked in

QS Top 100



Seven of our subjects ranked

Top 20

in The Complete University Guide

Student population



6,500+

undergraduates



400+

postgraduate research
students



5,500+

taught postgraduates



12,500+

students across four delivery locations
and online

All data correct as of May 2025

Global

We will mobilise our diversity and extensive global network to create a globally connected College, collaborating with like-minded partners to push the boundaries of knowledge in social sciences, shape policies and practices, and drive change on the global stage.

Currently more than half of our students and one-third of our staff come from international backgrounds. Beyond our Edgbaston and Dubai campuses, we also deliver transnational education programmes in Singapore. We will build on these foundations to ensure our graduates are among the most employable, innovative, and entrepreneurial, and equipped with a strong sense of global responsibility.

1. Strengthen our global standing

- Elevate the College's and University's positions in world university rankings, such as the QS Global Top 50, by creating impactful engagement with practitioners, policymakers, and public services.
- Promote our identity and reputation as a world-leading convenor of social sciences research and education to all our global stakeholders, students, and staff through our international collaborations and partnerships, and actively engage with our global alumni.

2. Be a top choice for social sciences staff and students worldwide

- Grow and diversify international student recruitment and conversion pathways to attract high-calibre international applicants from our target and emerging markets.
- Attract and retain distinguished academics and professional services staff worldwide, supporting their professional growth and ambitions through purposeful staff mobility and professional development.

3. Cultivate learners' global competencies across our campuses and delivery modes

- Encourage more learners to benefit from international exposure and experience through year- or semester-abroad programmes, Go Global Summer, exchange programmes, study tours, international conferences, overseas placements, and virtual mobility, all of which contribute to learners' enhanced employability in the global job market.
- Make use of the strengths of our campuses, transnational education programmes, alumni network, and global partnerships to develop learners' global awareness, intercultural communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and networking skills, all in alignment with the University's graduate attributes and global vision.

4. Collaborate with like-minded global partners to elevate the status of the social sciences

- Adopt an integrated system of global partnerships for education, research, staff and student mobility, and student employability in both strategic and emerging regions, focusing on value alignment, measurable outcomes, and equitable knowledge co-creation.
- Enhance the College's and University's global impact through interdisciplinary, challenge-led, practitioner-relevant social sciences activities across our two campuses.



Funded research projects with over
180 institutions
across more than 50 countries



Entry agreements with
c.30 universities
across more than 10 countries



Published with over
1,200 organisations
across more than 10 countries



c.160
programmes across four delivery locations
and online

All data correct as of May 2025



Students on our Dubai campus.
Find out more about our Dubai campus:



People and culture

The talent, motivation, and diversity of our people are central to our continued progress and the ability to deliver our vision. We are focused on building a thriving organisational culture – for our academic and professional services staff at all career stages – which will drive the College's continued success.

We recognise the importance of community and connection within School and College teams and the need for a distinctive 'whole College' vision. We will draw on the expertise of our researchers and the wealth of knowledge in social sciences to drive sustainable, innovative, and ethical approaches, sharing best practice and collaborating with the wider University and communities across Birmingham.

1. Be bold and pioneering in optimising the strengths of a diverse workforce and student body

- Embed equity and diversity in our research, education, business operations, and leadership, making step changes in the representation of under-represented and marginalised groups, reducing pay gaps and embedding a culture that provides opportunities for all to flourish and succeed.

2. Create a leadership culture that is collaborative, supportive, respectful, and empowering, as well as decisive, open, and transparent, while sustaining high performance

- Develop a strong leadership pipeline in all career routes, proactively identifying and supporting future leaders and ensuring diversity throughout career stages.
- Facilitate a culture of capacity building for line managers through Continuing Professional Development and training to enable managers to foster a positive culture within local teams.

3. Ensure all staff feel listened to, seeking and responding to staff feedback both formal and informal.

- Develop our capability to attract and support employees working in Birmingham, Dubai, and overseas.
- Ensure our positive staff culture is open and visible to staff we seek to attract, underpinned by robust and fair recruitment practices.
- Ensure clear career development opportunities for both academic and professional services staff.

- Be clear about our mission to support staff by training and developing academic and professional services excellence, and delivering a suite of career development support, such as promotions workshops and through Birmingham Professional.

- Eradicate casualisation where possible and support the development of all staff and their careers.

- Support the continued development of the Birmingham Academic Career Framework and the Academic Development Programme and implementing these positively to give a distinctive College ethos.

- Take a proactive approach to career development for professional services staff, building skills and opportunities through a focus on workforce planning and talent management in line with the Professional Services Purpose and Principles.

4. Promote staff wellbeing for all colleagues

- Create a culture that celebrates success, encourages professional growth, mental health prioritisation, and a balanced workplace culture. This work will be overseen by a College-wide people and culture steering group, dedicated to driving initiatives in these areas and acting on the feedback of staff.
- Increase operational effectiveness by reducing bureaucracy to lessen unnecessary burden and time.
- Develop a leadership culture that has a visible focus on wellbeing by listening, acknowledging and being open with its response to staff feedback.



c.70

nationalities represented amongst our staff



c.60%

of our staff identify as female



c.35%

minority ethnic staff



300+

professional staff

All data correct as of May 2025

Co-creation and implementation

The belief that social science plays a critical role in understanding and improving how people live and experience their lives is shared across our whole College community, from our students and alumni to our colleagues and external partners.

Both our vision and the approach taken to implementing this strategy has been co-created with academic and professional services staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and external end-users of our work.

The co-creation journey

- Co-creation workshops for each of the four workstreams – education, research, global, people and culture – were attended by colleagues from across the University;
- Co-creation workshops held on our Dubai campus;
- Engagement sessions with early career research and postgraduate research students;
- Engagement with our external Advisory Board, the Academy of Social Sciences, the British Academy, and the Economic and Social Research Council;
- Input from undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives;
- Engagement events in the Schools of Education, Government, Social Policy and Society, and Birmingham Business School.

Implementation

This strategy is designed to dovetail with the University's 2030 strategic framework and to support the distinctive strategies for each school and the Dubai campus.

A collaborative approach to implementation will ensure opportunities are maximised across education, research, global engagement, and our communities. We have developed a five-year implementation plan outlining how we will deliver on our ambitions and prioritise our activity, resources, and investment.

The skills, expertise, and commitment of Professional Services teams across the College and University will be critical to the successful implementation of the College strategy given their central role in delivering exceptional education, impactful research, and fostering strong connections with external partners.

Measures of success

As we work with internal and external stakeholders to deliver on our ambition and commitments, we will carefully monitor our progress to ensure that the actions we are taking are impactful and meaningful. We have agreed a range of measures of success across all areas of the strategy, taking a flexible and future orientated approach.

Thank you

With thanks to all our staff, students, and external partners for their input into this process, particularly to members of the College's Advisory Board:

Liam Byrne MP, MP for Birmingham Hodge Hill and Solihull North

Deborah Cadman OBE, University of Birmingham Council Member

Tim Gardam CBE, University of Birmingham Council Member

Dr Rita Gardner CBE, CEO, Academy of Social Sciences

Preet Kaur Gill MP, MP for Edgbaston

Alex Keen, UoB Guild Education Officer

Andrew Mitchell MP, MP for Royal Sutton Coldfield





Find out more about the College and our
ongoing work: [birmingham.ac.uk/about/
college-of-social-sciences/](https://birmingham.ac.uk/about/college-of-social-sciences/)

