

Vice-Chancellor's Report



At Birmingham we are seizing opportunities to shape our university for the 21st century: securing our position amongst the world's leading universities; be recognised for the quality of our research and graduates; and securing prestigious partnerships with international business and industry.

Higher education in the UK is experiencing unprecedented change as the effects of the new fees system, tighter immigration controls and the global economic downturn have an impact across the sector. Whilst change creates turbulence, it also creates opportunities.

Numerous recent successes exemplify our progress: progress which is being achieved against the tide. In 2011 we welcomed the most highly qualified cohort of new undergraduate students in more than a decade. In the National Student Survey we achieved a student satisfaction rating of 88%, 4% ahead of the national average. Following two years of steep increases, the percentage of students in graduate-level work or further study six months after graduation rose to its highest point to date, 80%: a notable achievement in a depressed employment market, and one that places us 10th in the UK for the employability of our students.

The University increased research grant capture by an outstanding 50% in this past year, with the College of Arts and Law second only to Oxford amongst English universities for the value of research funding secured. The exceptional research of our Chemical Engineers was recognised by a prestigious Queen's Anniversary Prize in early 2012, the highest honour which can be awarded to universities or colleges. The Prize was presented in

recognition of the world-leading work of our Centre for Formulation Engineering, the first and only institute of this scale and breadth in the UK, whose pioneering research in micro-structured materials has attracted multi-national partners including Cadbury/Kraft, Proctor & Gamble and Unilever.

We have invested in order to secure the quality of our academic community for the future. The Birmingham Fellows initiative which, when launched, was unique in the UK, attracted over 1,400 applications from young, ambitious researchers from across the globe, each interested in developing their career at our university. The strength and range of the applicants persuaded us to increase the number recruited and 34 outstanding young academics are already making their presence felt on campus. Applications for the new cohort are equally impressive.

Birmingham's profile on the international stage has risen significantly in the past year. The University of Birmingham's Guangzhou Centre was opened in autumn 2011, evidence of our long-term commitment to China and the strength of our partnership with Birmingham's sister city. Our unique partnership with the Guangzhou Municipal Government (GMG) is the foundation for a portfolio of research initiatives across healthcare, engineering and environmental sciences that have

attracted £1.46million funding, to date. The office is also developing plans for an International Graduate Education Centre and partnerships with leading research institutes, hospitals, and companies in Guangzhou.

In the USA, our relationships in the Mid-West and with the cultural sector in Chicago have been strengthened following the University's contribution to Chicago's Cultural Plan, a successful Cultural Symposium and work with the National Public Housing Museum. This range of activities demonstrates our value and commitment as a partner in the region. Our academic partnerships with the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, University of Chicago and Northwestern University are crystallising into a range of successful research collaborations.

In Brazil, our research expertise in oil and gas, bio-energy, foreign policy and sporting legacies, as well as our strategic partnership with the University of Nottingham, have made us an attractive partner for Brazilian institutions and the Brazilian Government. £2million of funding is being invested in our joint initiative which includes research partnerships and postgraduate scholarships that will grow the country's knowledge base and enable them to exploit their natural resources more effectively.

This has also been a landmark year for the future of our Edgbaston estate. The Bramall Music Building was completed, realising Chamberlain's original vision for the heart of the University. This magnificent building affords previously hidden views across campus and includes the Elgar Concert Hall, an acoustically perfect venue that is an asset for both the University, and the city. In addition, the University secured planning permission for the next phase of our hugely ambitious capital programme including plans for a state-of-the-art Sports Complex, the most ambitious and exciting new Library in any UK university this century, and a series of over 20 individual projects that will fit our campus for the next 100 years – all ensuring that the quality of our facilities are in keeping with the quality of our academic community and surpass their expectations.

An act of extraordinary generosity by two alumni of the University helped to make the Bramall possible and again, against the economic downturn, the University was able to announce that its fundraising initiative, Circles of Influence, had achieved its £60million target 12 months ahead of schedule. Inspired by this success we have increased the target to £160million, driven by the



knowledge that funds raised through philanthropy enable us to change lives. Circles of Influence is already supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, funding research into healthcare developments and new technologies, and is helping us to preserve and develop the fabric of the University for the future.

We are rightly proud of our achievements this year, not least because they have been carefully planned and hard won. They are also a statement of intent. In this period of change and challenge, our strategy is being tested and our successes this year demonstrate that our plans are robust. Our vertiginous rise in the *Sunday Times* league table, advancing 12 places to 13th, is the highest of any research intensive institution and further evidence of a sea change at Birmingham.

We are well placed, not simply to survive the current turbulence, but to emerge a still more resilient, successful, and influential academic force in our city; within our country; and across the globe.

Professor David Eastwood
Vice-Chancellor and Principal

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