

Vice-Chancellor's Report



Our ability to transform lives and society underpins who we are and what we do. We have built our reputation on delivering remarkable research that changes the world, the highest quality teaching that transforms lives, and powerful partnerships that create new possibilities, transforming the way we approach and tackle the challenges that face us locally and globally.

So, it is always rewarding when others recognise the remarkable work and achievements of this great university and its people. In addition to continuing to enhance our national and international league table positions, the last 12 months saw the outstanding impact of our research recognised by the Queen's Anniversary Prize awarded to our Centre for Rail Research and Education. Likewise, the quality of our teaching and student experience was recognised with a Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework, and our pioneering University of Birmingham School achieved a 'Good' OFSTED rating – the highest level awarded for a new school.

Our recent campus developments and investments also gained royal recognition, with HRH The Princess Royal formally opening the new £51 million Sports & Fitness Centre, HRH The Prince of Wales visiting the £30 million Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFoR) facility in Staffordshire, and HRH the Duke of Cambridge visiting in connection with our Jubilee Centre's work on character education. In a first for a Russell Group and Global 100 university, the year also saw the official opening of our Dubai campus and the arrival of our first cohort of students there.

These and many other successes were delivered against a challenging political and economic backdrop, and in these times of uncertainty our ability to chart our own course is more important than ever. This is why we launched 'Birmingham 2026', our ambitious plan for growing our research activity, increasing and diversifying our student body, and rebalancing our income.

Research that changes the world

I am delighted that across the University the quality and reputation of our research has continued to grow, with almost a quarter of our research output amongst the top 10% most cited academic publications in the world. The last year has been our most successful for attracting research income from funders, including government, charitable organisations, and business. Our research grant capture exceeded £200 million, a testament to the quality and significance of our research.

The influence and real-world impact of our research is exemplified in the work of the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research and Education. In addition to its Queen's Anniversary Prize which recognised its longstanding work as a leader in railway innovation

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and teaching, the Centre also secured £92 million of industry and government funding to create the UK Rail Research and Innovation Network. Led by the University of Birmingham, the Network will create a powerful collaboration between academia and industry.

Energy and the environment remain vital areas of research. The Birmingham Energy Institute published extensively about sustainable clean cooling across the globe, and regionally is leading our investment in the Tyseley Energy Park. At the Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFoR), we are three years into a world-leading 'big science' project.

Elsewhere, our School of Physics and Astronomy continues its high-profile research in frontier science, leading work with NASA on the Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS), which will survey the brightest stars across the sky – another powerful partnership that will open up new possibilities.

We are also transforming healthcare. We opened the NIHR Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre with the aim of using cutting-edge, experimental medicine to accelerate access to, and adoption of, drugs, devices and diagnostics tests for patients with chronic inflammatory diseases; and established the Centre for Conflict Wound Research to achieve scar-free healing within a generation. Through Birmingham Health Partners, which brings together the University and two leading NHS Trusts, we were chosen to lead one of six new sites to address challenging healthcare issues using data science, while our plans to transform a brownfield site at the edge of campus into the Birmingham Life Sciences Park are rapidly taking shape. Our strengths in life sciences and the impact of Birmingham Health Partners also gained national recognition, with the government choosing Birmingham as the place to launch its UK Life Sciences Industrial Strategy.

Through University of Birmingham Enterprise, we have supported more than 300 innovators working on ideas as far-reaching as eye drops for age-related macular degeneration and a test to predict who will develop Alzheimer's disease.

Our academic colleagues also continue to inform and influence policy. For example, our new Institute for Mental Health published an influential policy commission on youth mental health in July 2018, recommending a radical new preventative approach to mental healthcare, which is already informing policy and practice. The last year also saw the launch of the Birmingham Institute for Global Innovation focused on exploiting our interdisciplinary research strengths to produce practical solutions to some of the greatest challenges facing humanity, such as pollution, climate action, and access to healthcare.

We know that a strong foundation is central to any transformation, and we have continued to focus on recruiting the very best academic staff. In fact, the last three years have seen our staff numbers grow by over 14% to more than 8,000. We have also celebrated the achievements of academic colleagues whose work to advance their academic disciplines has been nationally or internationally recognised; Professors Alison Davenport, Julian Bion, and James Arthur were all awarded OBEs, and Professor Tim Softley, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research and Knowledge Transfer, was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, one of the highest accolades a scientist can achieve. Professor Ewa Dabrowska was also awarded Germany's most prestigious research award, the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship.

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Teaching that transforms lives

The quality of our teaching was also recognised last year, with a Gold rating in the Teaching Excellence Framework, which commended as 'outstanding' student satisfaction with the quality of teaching, and the progression of our graduates to highly skilled employment or further study. We also received a Spotlight Award in the Global Teaching Excellence Award 2018 – which recognised our 'exemplary vision for achieving teaching excellence across the whole institution'. This reflected our renewed focus on teaching under the leadership of Professor Kathy Armour, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, and the establishment of the Higher Education Futures institute (HEFi), which supports academic staff to deliver ever more effective and innovative research-led teaching.

Our graduate employment remains among the best in the sector, and we continue to innovate to make sure that our students have the very best prospects when they move into their careers. The launch of two degree apprenticeship programmes in collaboration with business continued our tradition of offering students innovative options for study. Working with PwC and Vodafone we launched two, four-year, fully funded technology degree apprenticeships to develop the UK's next generation of technology talent. We also launched a Public Management and Leadership degree apprenticeship in our Institute of Local Government Studies.

It is not just on our Edgbaston campus where we have innovated, explored, and developed new opportunities for students to benefit from a University of Birmingham degree. Last year also saw the first students graduate from our online MBA and MSc programmes, developed in partnership with Wiley Education Services. We also launched a new partnership with Jinan University to deliver joint Maths degrees in China and opened our

Phase 1 campus in Dubai. In bringing Birmingham to Dubai, we have become the first global top 100 and Russell Group university to establish a campus in the international education hub of Dubai.

Our students have a major, positive impact on the places they live and study. We are a net importer of talent into Birmingham and the West Midlands, with almost half of our students choosing to stay here after they graduate compared to the quarter of students that come from the region. While they are here, nearly 8,000 students volunteer through the Guild of Students, giving their time to thousands of projects every year. They also use their specialist skills to help others; our medical students deliver free CPR training in the community, and our Law students undertake a range of pro-bono work supporting local residents – work that was recognised by the Attorney General.

Partnerships that create new possibilities

Our commitment to the region is also demonstrated by our latest philanthropic campaign – 10,000 Lives – which is focused on transforming the lives of young people across the West Midlands by supporting them to enter higher education.

In July 2017, we signed an innovative new partnership with University College Birmingham (UCB) to work together to strengthen Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE) pathways for young people in the city and beyond. This builds on our existing relationship, which has seen the University of Birmingham accredited and award 20,000 University College Birmingham degrees over the past 22 years.

We have also entered into an innovative partnership with Lloyds Banking Group to transform responsible business practice and launched the £2.5 million Lloyds Banking Group Centre for Responsible Businesses.

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Internationally, our partnerships in research, education, and cultural engagement with the University of Melbourne and University of Illinois continue to flourish, and our partnerships in China have become yet broader and deeper. In addition to the joint Maths degrees offered with Jinan University, we signed an agreement with the prestigious Chinese Academy of Sciences to launch a joint research centre into energy storage, committed to develop new biomedical technologies with Southeast University, and signed a memorandum of understanding with the Nanjing Municipal Government to work on a range of research, innovation and cultural projects. We cemented our commitment to India with the launch of our India Institute and we celebrated the impact of this work when our Chancellor, Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor (International) Professor Robin Mason, were named as two of the most influential figures in UK-India relations.

Campus transformation

Closer to home, the transformation of our campus, as part of our £1 billion investment programme, has gathered pace and new buildings have opened to widespread acclaim – both architecturally and from those who use the space to research, teach, and study.

Our new Sports & Fitness Centre has already hosted a number of national and international events, including the British Transplant Games and the World University Squash Championships. Preparations have also begun for the pivotal role we will play in the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Our Collaborative Teaching Laboratory (CTL) opened in autumn 2018, bringing together practical teaching activities and transforming the way we teach STEM programmes to undergraduate students. We are also extending our Business School and have broken

ground on two significant new academic buildings – a School of Engineering, which will sit alongside a rail innovation centre being created in partnership with industry, and a new Teaching and Learning building. Perhaps the biggest transformation is at the heart of campus, where significant progress has been made on a major project to restore the original vision of campus and create 12 acres of parkland. Due for completion in early 2019, the Green Heart project is already transforming the way staff, students and visitors use campus.

Strong performance in challenging times

The last few years have been challenging for the sector and the coming year is likely to see further uncertainty affecting higher education. The government's review into post-18 education will report, with expected far-reaching change and reform, and the effects of Brexit on the sector remain to be seen.

But we are used to change and challenge and against this backdrop have continued to thrive, consolidating our strong position in domestic and international league tables where we moved up to 79th in the world in the 2019 *QS World University Rankings*. Indeed, we are in the best possible position to face those challenges with resilience and tenacity. It is by remaining resolute in our purpose – delivering research that changes the world, teaching that transform lives, and partnerships that create new possibilities – that we will continue to reach new heights of achievement and discovery.

Professor Sir David Eastwood
Vice-Chancellor