Universitas 21
at the University of Birmingham
Universitas 21 (U21) is the leading global network of research-intensive universities and the University of Birmingham is not only proud to be a member of such a group, but also to have been among the founding members in 1997.

U21 is tackling the big issues associated with the new global era in higher education and Birmingham is keeping good company as part of the U21 network, with institutions like Fudan University, National University of Singapore, University of Melbourne, University of Delhi, University of British Columbia and the University of Virginia also key members. In recent meetings with the heads of member institutions we have been impressed by how proactive the membership is and by the eagerness of our partners to advance the network.

U21 is an asset that will help the University of Birmingham achieve our international aspirations (see the University’s international mission statement on page 5). Birmingham has made a considerable commitment to U21 and now is the time for staff, both academic and administrative, to engage with the network in an energetic and strategic fashion. Mobility for students and early-career researchers is a key area of focus for Birmingham.

Our recent commitment to embarking on a programme of Joint PhDs within the U21 network is a clear demonstration of how U21 can focus on big strategic issues. This initiative holds the potential to give doctoral training a trans-national dimension, preparing young researchers for highly mobile careers. It is an excellent addition to the annual competitions we run around staff fellowships, PhD scholarships and other student mobility bursaries.

This publication showcases how the University of Birmingham has interacted with Universitas 21 since 1997 and how you too can engage with the network. By situating your international collaborative work within the network you can be certain of quality interactions that will be supported by the International Relations Office. Contact details for International Relations staff that you can liaise with on U21 issues are listed on the back page.

Professor David Eastwood
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
In 1997, the University of Birmingham became a founding member of Universitas 21 (U21). Today, U21 has become an international network of 21 leading research-intensive universities in 13 countries and is recognised as one of the most reputable networks by peers.

The network’s purpose is to facilitate collaboration and co-operation between the member universities and to create opportunities for them on a scale that none of them would be able to achieve operating independently or through traditional bilateral alliances.

The University of Birmingham has taken a leading role in the network throughout the 12 years of U21’s existence. Under the tenure of Professor Michael Clarke, the University’s U21 Manager from 1997 to 2008, U21 was an important aspect of the work of the International Relations Office. The University has employed a U21 Officer for the past five years, with responsibility for the administration side of our involvement in the network.

Examples of some of the collaborations and interactions with the network by the University can be found in on page 4.

With a new U21 Manager and Vice-Principal, Professor Michael Sheppard, there is now an opportunity to re-focus on the aspects of U21 that will work best for Birmingham.

Birmingham has hosted the administrative arm of U21 since 2003. Jane Usherwood (Secretary General), Clare Noakes (Administrator), and Tarlok Singh (Finance Administrator) are important members of our campus community.

The University has also steadily increased funding in order to connect more fully with U21, especially through staff and student mobility, but also to allow staff to attend important U21 meetings and events: for example, staff from our Estates Office attended the Learning Environments Design Forum at the University of Hong Kong in 2008 and at the University of Melbourne in 2007; staff from Global Ethics and the Business School attended a U21 symposium on strategic partnerships with the developing world at University College Dublin in 2008; and a staff member from the College of Arts and Law attended the Digital Humanities Conference at the University of Virginia in 2008.

As well as funding mobility initiatives, Birmingham has been proud to host U21 events including the Diversity and Multiculturalism Conference in 2006; Internationalisation Forum in 2007; and the U21 Summer School, the U21 Graduate Conference and the U21 International Conference on Energy Technologies and Policy. The latter three events took place in 2008 and saw over 150 delegates attending from numerous U21 institutions. The theme for the Summer School was ‘Embracing Diversity through Creativity’ and the University and the city of Birmingham itself proved an excellent location for such an event with its large multicultural population. The Graduate Conference on ‘Water’ was highly innovative. Attendees, on top of presenting papers, were given an opportunity to develop a range of research-based and transferable skills, working in small groups to develop posters and involving themselves in a drama workshop to unleash creativity. The conference on energy issues was the first such conference convened by U21 and it showcased some of the cutting-edge energy research that is being carried out in universities all over the world.

Now is the time, therefore, to re-engage with the U21 network and look to make the partnerships it creates work for the University of Birmingham.

U21 Secretariat
The U21 Secretariat services the network and works on behalf of all the U21 member institutions. Their office, previously based in Melbourne, is currently hosted by the University of Birmingham. Their website is www.universitas21.com
Here you can find important information regarding the collaborative groups, projects, events and student opportunities.

The team
Jane Usherwood, Secretary General
Clare Noakes, Administrator
Tarlok Singh, Finance Administrator
A history of participation

In the early years, much co-operation concentrated on building relationships between U21 members to establish the network, especially on student mobility issues. Professor Michael Clarke chaired the first Managers’ Meeting in 1999.

Since 2000, staff from the College of Medical and Dental Sciences have been involved with the U21 Health Sciences Group. Projects around virtual mobility and e-learning have emerged from this interaction. More recently, after a PhD student from the College of Medical and Dental Sciences visited Auckland on a U21 PhD Scholarship, collaboration on gene therapy in relation to cancer studies has developed, culminating in a joint article in the British Journal of Cancer.

U21 promotes collaborative initiatives and has established a number of groups that support this. The University has engaged with many of these, including the Health Sciences Group and the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies (DDOGS), chaired by Professor Chris Thomas, former Director of the Graduate School at Birmingham.

The University has also had involvement in other collaborative groups over the years, including Heads of Administration, International Operations, Marketing, Museums, Teaching and Learning, Deans of Education, Deans of Engineering, Information Services, Heads of Geography and Student Mobility.

Engineering negotiated a successful articulation agreement with our U21 partner Fudan University in 2004. This agreement has seen 50 students come to Birmingham from Fudan.

The ‘Water Futures for Sustainable Cities’ project began in 2006. This project is directly relevant to the UN Millennium Development Goals as well as to important environmental regulations such as the European Union Water Framework Directive. Professor Rae Mackay from the School of Geography, Environmental and Earth Sciences is a member of the management team, comprising leading academics from five other U21 universities. Over the past year, Professor Chris Skelcher from the College of Social Sciences has worked on projects with the University of Melbourne in relation to public policy.

### 1997
- **March**
  - Universitas 21 founded by the universities of Auckland, Birmingham, British Columbia, Edinburgh, Glasgow, McGill, Melbourne, New South Wales, Nottingham, Queensland and Singapore

### 1998
- **April**
  - Hong Kong, Fudan and Peking universities admitted as members

### 1999
- **April**
  - Decision to seek incorporation
  - Executive Committee formed
- **November**
  - First U21 Managers’ Meeting, chaired by Professor Michael Clarke, Birmingham
- **December**
  - The company Universitas 21 LBG created

### 2000
- **April**
  - Freiburg, Lund, Michigan and Toronto universities admitted as members
- **May**
  - First Student Mobility Co-ordinators’ meeting
- **September**
  - U21 Deans of Education group formed

### 2001
- **November**
  - U21 Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies group (DDOGS) formed

### 2002
- **May**
  - University of Virginia admitted as member; Toronto and Michigan universities leave
- **October**
  - U21 PVC Research group formed
- **October**
  - U21 Heads of Administration group formed
Universitas 21 has six core underlying principles to inform its activities. These were endorsed at the 2007 AGM:

1. A global focus and perspective
2. A commitment to excellence in all we do
3. A commitment of those involved to collaborative and co-operative work and spirit while ensuring there are clear outcomes
4. A determination to achieve added value
5. A constant striving for innovation and the creation of multilateral opportunities for members
6. Sustainability of activity

The University of Birmingham’s intended mission statement starts from the point that Birmingham commands a strong and distinctive international reputation for the quality of its educational provision, the impact of its research and its service to society.

In terms of its research and knowledge transfer, Birmingham aims to be judged as being in the top 50 universities in the world.

In further developing this international profile and reputation, the University places particular emphasis upon:

- Producing research of international impact and significance, shaping the ways in which the world is seen and understood
- Welcoming the most able students, teachers, and researchers from across the world and celebrating diversity in culture and perspective
- Enabling students and staff to engage international cultures to further their personal and professional development
- Educating students to become informed and responsible citizens and supporting them as alumni to make leading contributions internationally
- Promoting partnership with international universities, funding bodies and other private and public organisations
- Supporting the social, cultural and economic interests of the city and region through the University’s international expertise and engagement

The 2008 U21 Summer School participants at Birmingham.
How can you engage with Universitas 21?

Anybody can sign up to the U21 e-bulletin which will keep them abreast of developments and events across the network.

Details on how to subscribe at: www.universitas21.com/ebulletin/ebulletin

The e-bulletin can also be used to promote events or establish if there is a desire for collaboration on issues of interest. U21 can be a conduit for collaboration on teaching initiatives, research projects or developing administrative best practice. These collaborations can be developed with one or more U21 partners and the International Relations Office reserves a portion of its U21 budget to provide seed-funding for initiatives along these lines.

For more information on how to establish collaborative groups please contact the International Relations Office. There are other schemes run by the University of Birmingham that encourage staff and students to get involved with the U21 network and these are detailed in the following pages.

‘There are numerous ways in which staff and students at the University of Birmingham can engage with U21. U21 provides our staff and students with amazing opportunities to collaborate and network on the international stage.’

Professor Michael Sheppard
Vice-Principal and U21 Manager
The Fellowship Programme aims to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills within the network and encourage the sharing of best practice.

The programme is designed primarily to provide support to academic and administrative staff. Staff Fellowship trips are usually around a month in length and staff are encouraged to visit one or two institutions.

The Fellowships are awarded up to a maximum of £5,000, which contributes towards the travel and accommodation costs incurred.

Zena Wooldridge, Director, University of Birmingham Sport

‘In July and August 2008 I travelled to Australia and the USA on a U21 Fellowship to investigate two areas of direct relevance to the development of sport at Birmingham:

- Business models for 50m swimming pools, to help inform the University of Birmingham’s decision on the most effective size and configuration of its proposed new pool
- The legacy benefits to Australian universities from hosting the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney – what might Birmingham learn from Australia’s experience?

‘I chose Australia (Melbourne, New South Wales and Queensland) because its model for university sport is similar to the UK, and 50m pools are a common university feature. The University of Virginia (UVa) was chosen because its 50m pool is now ten years old, within a sports facility of similar configuration to that proposed for the University.

‘Perhaps the most valuable learning outcome of the visits was about optimal swimming pool size, configuration and design to support the organisation’s business-financial objectives, bearing in mind our water space at Birmingham is used far more intensively than any pool visited in Australia or at UVa. The only 50m university pool with a boom (a moveable platform that divides the pool into two or three parts) was at UVa. What was also evident in most cases was the addition of a small learner pool, to support children’s ‘learn to swim’ programmes as the most significant income stream.

‘These outcomes suggest that Birmingham should consider the inclusion of a moveable boom, an ancillary teaching pool and possibly a moveable depth floor in its pool design, to achieve maximum use of pool space (and therefore financial viability) across as many possible groups of users, from toddlers and the disabled to water-polo and elite swimmers. It is likely to exclude diving due to the significantly higher cost of much deeper water.

‘The second area of study, Olympic legacy, highlighted the differences in higher education sport between Australia and UK. It certainly appears that UK universities are far better positioned to contribute to and benefit from the UK hosting London 2012 than Australian universities did from Sydney 2000. Possible contribution and benefits to higher education include: business benefits (eg, hosting Olympic visitors on campus); hosting pre-Olympic camps, which may have business, profile and relationship value; investment in more and better sports facilities; and improved international relations through sport.

‘It seems that higher education sport in Britain has positioned itself well to capitalise on various aspects of Olympic legacy as no other previous host nation has. One of the Olympic legacy opportunities out of the U21 fellowship may be the strengthening of U21 international relations through the creation of a U21 Sports Network, led by Birmingham.’
Dr Kate Rumbold
The Shakespeare Institute

‘I’m a Research Fellow at the Shakespeare Institute, where I co-ordinate the AHRC-funded project ‘Interrogating Cultural Value in the Twenty-First Century: The Case of Shakespeare’. The four-year project, led by Professor Kate McLuskie and including two PhD students, explores the perceived value of Shakespeare in contemporary education, theatre and cultural policy.

‘My U21 Staff Fellowship enabled me to spend a month working with another major research project in McGill University, Montreal. ‘Making Publics: 1500–1700’ is a five-year project, headed by Professor Paul Yachnin, that investigates the way that Shakespeare and the theatre created a new, public life for people in the early modern period. It draws an interdisciplinary team of nearly 40 researchers from several North American institutions.

‘Our projects first connected when we organised a keynote panel – ‘Is Shakespeare Good For You?’ – at the British Shakespeare Association (BSA) conference in 2007. Professor Yachnin travelled to Stratford to represent the theoretical and historical perspective on Shakespeare’s value, alongside policymakers and practitioners. The success of this U21-supported exchange suggested the value of a more sustained collaboration. Applying for a Fellowship, I set out to answer three questions: first, what could our projects tell each other intellectually about the long-term connections between Shakespeare and the public? Secondly, how might our different-sized teams share best practice in managing a major project? And thirdly, how could we maximise the benefit of our projects to their host institutions?

‘By spending a month in Montreal, I was able to join in with a range of team activities, from staff meetings and research symposia to the ‘Making Publics’ graduate seminar; and to talk with staff and students at all levels. We traded theory, history and policy on the relationship of the public and the arts. We reflected on the benefits and challenges of collaborative research, and swapped techniques for sharing ideas constructively. We also discussed the longer-term development plans for McGill and the Shakespeare Institute that stem from our projects – a particularly valuable conversation due to the rarity in the humanities of our model of collaboration.

‘The impact of the Fellowship on everything from the way we run our project meetings to the way we write is still being felt more than a year later. Our best practice guide for collaborative projects will find a new audience when we join a ‘Teams Researching Shakespeare in Higher Education’ panel at the BSA.

A thriving cultural value seminar brings new students into our discussion; our directors continue to serve on each other’s advisory boards, and we’re looking to establish a regular student exchange between Birmingham and McGill.

‘The Fellowship was also enormously valuable for me as a new researcher. It was a welcome opportunity to share experiences with other post-doctoral fellows with a research management role. The bilingual (and snow-covered) city and university provided an exciting environment in which to write and research, and I’ve benefited from an extended international experience at an early stage in my academic career.’
PhD scholarships

The University offers a number of scholarships each year to assist our PhD students in travelling to Universitas 21 member universities. Students highlight one of our U21 partners that they wish to visit for the purposes of further research, discussion and networking on their thesis topic.

Each scholarship pays up to £1,500 and a visit is usually for a period of approximately one month.

Information of the U21 PhD scholarships is circulated by the International Relations Office to Doctoral students via The Graduate School and the University Colleges. Students and supervisors can contact International Relations Staff for further information; see the contact details on the back page.

Simon Vass
College of Medical and Dental Sciences, visited University of Auckland

‘With funding from a Universitas 21 PhD Travel Scholarship, I was fortunate to be able to visit the laboratory of Professors Bill Wilson and Bill Denny at the University of Auckland in 2006, towards the end of my PhD.

‘Our group at the University’s Cancer Research UK Institute for Cancer Studies has developed a gene therapy treatment, and a clinical trial has recently been completed, here in Birmingham, for the treatment of prostate cancer. Together with a vector, this system basically has two further components; an enzyme and a prodrug. While our group in Birmingham has many years experience in the optimisation of the enzyme side of the system, the group at the University of Auckland are pioneers in development of the prodrugs. I had met Professor Bill Wilson previously when he visited our department to give an external seminar. Following discussions later that day, we decided that he would send some prodrugs over from New Zealand for me to do some characterisation with.

‘This, however, was quite close to the end of my three years funding, so when I heard about the Universitas 21 funding that was available I thought it would be a fantastic opportunity to actually go to New Zealand to do the research there. I visited the group for one month and carried out some exciting experiments that gave some quite unexpected results.

‘We recently published part of this work in the British Journal of Cancer (Vass et al. 2009 Br J Cancer 100: 1903–1911) and both the Birmingham group and the Auckland group are keen to keep this collaboration moving forward. I feel that my visit to work in New Zealand has strengthened relationships between the two groups, and in addition it may be possible to form collaborative student projects between the two groups in the forthcoming years. This opportunity was the highlight of my PhD: it was a great experience to work in another laboratory and achieve exciting results towards my PhD in such a short time.

‘Leaving a hot British summer behind to visit a country in the middle of winter seemed strange at the time, but it was not a very difficult decision: when I wasn’t working in the laboratory I also had the opportunity to go skiing in July, white-water rafting, and I bungee jumped off the Auckland Harbour Bridge!’

‘This opportunity was the highlight of my PhD: it was a great experience to work in another laboratory and achieve exciting results towards my PhD in such a short time.’
Lindsey Underwood
Mechanical Engineering
with Business Management – study-abroad opportunity to the University of British Columbia

I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to study the third year of my Mechanical Engineering and Business degree at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. It was one of the most rewarding and enjoyable times of my life.

‘It took a while for me to settle in to a new university lifestyle and orientate myself around such a large campus, but with so much to see and so many opportunities within easy reach, it was not as difficult as I first expected. The early morning lectures at 8.00 do not seem to put anyone off, and all students are passionate about learning. It was noticeable how involved students seemed to be in class and were encouraged to participate as often as possible. I was also surprised to see there were even fewer females taking engineering than in the UK.

‘UBC is a beautiful campus where mountains, beaches and the sea are all within relatively close distance. I was amazed at the cleanliness and enthusiasm for recycling. Walking into a class of 150 students, none of whom I knew initially, was definitely something which intimidated me at first. However, I found it easy to meet people and I am now more confident about introducing myself to people I do not know. I was fortunate to be living on campus with people from Canada and Japan. This experience taught me a great deal about different cultures and admiration for students who do not speak English as their first language.

‘My year abroad also enabled me to fulfil my dream of learning to snowboard in Whistler and gave me the opportunity to experience life in Vancouver to the full. This was an unforgettable experience I would never have had otherwise and definitely a highlight of my year abroad.

Without the help that I received from Universitas 21 I do not feel I would have been able to experience as much as I have done, and for this I am really appreciative. I would definitely recommend an exchange trip for other students.’

U21 Student Mobility Bursaries

Students who are undertaking an international exchange in the third year of their degree programme and who will be spending their year abroad at a non-European U21 partner can apply for one of the eight £1,000 U21 Travel Bursaries. Applicable students will be contacted by the International Relations Office with details once their exchange has been confirmed.
Other Opportunities

U21 joint PhDs
The University of Birmingham has recently committed to promote joint PhDs among 13 other U21 partners. Collaborative degree programmes lead to a more sustainable type of relationship than many other internationalisation strategies and bring important academic benefits. These include knowledge transfer and sharing of research, learning and resources; international research collaboration; improved employment prospects for students; enhanced recruitment of excellent graduate students; and access to additional sources of student financial support.

College of Life and Environmental Sciences U21 Scholarships
The College of Life and Environmental Sciences has announced that it will be offering 25 £12,000 PhD Scholarships exclusively for alumni of Universitas 21 partners. Students will have the opportunity to commence research in the wide range of schools in the College:
- Biosciences
- Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences
- Psychology
- Sport and Exercise Sciences

Queen Elizabeth II Scholarships
The University is delighted to offer one international scholarship, worth £10,000, to graduates from a partner Universitas 21 institution to undertake a one-year taught Master’s degree at Birmingham.

Further details on these scholarships are available from Peter Jordan, Student Funding Office, Tel: +44 (0)121 414 2705, email: p.jordan@bham.ac.uk

Summer Schools
The U21 Summer School is an annual event, hosted by a different U21 partner each year for undergraduate students. The Summer School lasts for two weeks and each U21 partner institution has the opportunity to send participants.

Undergraduate Research Conference
The U21 Undergraduate Research Conference (URC) allows students from around the globe to present their research to a diverse audience and have it published in a special edition of the University of Virginia’s journal The Oculus.

Each U21 partner institution has the opportunity to send participants to the URC.

Graduate Research Conference
The success of the inaugural Graduate Research Conference (GRC) at Birmingham has seen the event become a permanent fixture in the U21 calendar. The theme of Birmingham’s conference was ‘Water’ and the 2009 event will be focused on ‘Sustainable Cities for the Future’, jointly hosted by Melbourne and Queensland universities. Each U21 partner institution has the opportunity to send participants to the GRC.

U21 meetings and conferences/symposia
Throughout the academic year there are numerous events that are of interest to both academic and administrative university staff, providing the opportunity to meet and collaborate with colleagues from our U21 partners. These events not only provide the chance to present or hear papers on areas of interest to an individual’s research or role, but also to network and potentially develop lasting links.

The International Relations Office is happy to partially fund many of the above opportunities.

Further information on the above can be found at www.international.bham.ac.uk

U21 members

Australia
University of Melbourne
University of New South Wales
University of Queensland

Canada
University of British Columbia
McGill University

China
Fudan University
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

Hong Kong
University of Hong Kong

India
University of Delhi

Ireland
University College Dublin

Japan
Waseda University

Mexico
Tecnológico de Monterrey

New Zealand
University of Auckland

South Korea
Korea University

Sweden
Lund University

United Kingdom
University of Birmingham
University of Edinburgh
University of Glasgow
University of Nottingham

United States of America
University of Virginia

Singapore
National University of Singapore
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www.universitas21.com/ebulletin/
ebulletinregistration.html

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