



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



# Birmingham Professional

## 2024 – 25

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We connect  
**We activate**  
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# Introduction

At the University of Birmingham, our community of approximately 5,000 Professional Services staff play an essential role in delivering the University's strategy. These dedicated colleagues contribute to the University's success through managerial, administrative, technical, and operational expertise. Birmingham Professional is a community that brings together colleagues across all roles and grades, strengthening our shared identity, developing critical skills and understanding, and celebrating the vital contribution that Professional Services staff make to the life and success of the University.

Established in 2010, Birmingham Professional has three main objectives:

- to establish an **identity** for Professional Services staff; bringing together people who work in different roles and locations and enhancing their sense of community and belonging, and their connection to the University.
- to create an **ethos** for the Professional Services community centred around pursuing excellence, taking pride in their contribution to the University, feeling personal responsibility for development, and working collaboratively. This ethos aims to underpin a culture of partnership, trust, and respect between academic and Professional Services colleagues.
- to provide a **framework** through which a range of activities and opportunities can be offered to develop the knowledge and skills of Professional Services colleagues and to support their confidence in performing to the highest standard.

Birmingham Professional is led by the Executive Office on behalf of the Registrar and the Registrar's Leadership Group. Its overall direction and individual areas of focus are shaped by the Birmingham



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2030 Strategic Framework, and aligned with the annual priorities of the University Executive Board and the Registrar's Leadership Group.

Birmingham Professional development events are designed to combine theoretical knowledge and practical experience, giving participants an understanding of how to develop their expertise, and then how to deploy that expertise here at the University of Birmingham. This unique approach means that insights are relevant to the context in which colleagues work and can be more easily incorporated into our roles. This makes Birmingham Professional a collaborative effort, with initiatives mostly developed centrally but delivered using the experience and skills of colleagues across the University.

Over the past year, more than a thousand Professional Services colleagues have benefited from participating in Birmingham Professional activities to build their skills and connect with colleagues. This report captures the breadth and impact of Birmingham Professional, showing a year of success, pride, and collaboration.



# Birmingham Professional Forum

Chaired each term by the Registrar, the Birmingham Professional Forum is an opportunity to hear directly from the Registrar and other senior Professional Services and Academic leaders, and to connect with colleagues from across the University. The Forum provides insights into important initiatives taking place across the University, ground-breaking research discoveries being made by our academics, and how changes in the Higher Education landscape might affect our work. Participants value the broader perspective these events provide and often report feeling an increased sense of pride in the University, as well as using the Forum as an opportunity to broaden their networks.

Each year we hold three Birmingham Professional Forum events, with over a thousand colleagues attending. This high level of participation has been consistent since Birmingham Professional's launch, demonstrating the event's reputation and value within the Professional Services community.

The first Forum this year was a rare opportunity for all Professional Services colleagues to hear from our Heads of College, as we welcomed Professor Helen Abbott and Professor Bill Bloss to share their inspiring vision for their colleges. They also took the time to reflect on and share the challenges and opportunities they face before answering questions from the audience.

The second and third events were a celebration of the University's 125 Anniversary as we shone a spotlight on the legacy and ongoing impact of our research, and explored the continued development of a distinctive Birmingham learning and teaching experience for our students.



**646** attendees online

**430** attendees in person

**9** guest speakers

**3** events per year



# Leadership development

**Leadership development at all levels has been a key focus of Birmingham Professional in recent years, empowering colleagues to grow in confidence and capability and take meaningful steps in their professional journey. A group of colleagues from across the University has collaborated to design and deliver engaging events under the following themes:**

**Me in Three:** colleagues share their, often unconventional, career journey in three slides, inspiring attendees to consider their progression into leadership roles. A session delivered in collaboration with the Race Equality Network during Black History Month offered powerful perspectives into the career paths of minoritised ethnic staff at the University.

**Demystifying:** the University can be a complex place to navigate, and these sessions break down key processes to enhance understanding. Sessions this year have covered finance, strategic planning, the Compact process, and HR, making them more accessible and equipping colleagues with the knowledge needed to lead with clarity and confidence.

**Managing the Whole Person:** these sessions focus on inclusive and respectful management techniques that benefit the individual and organisation. 'Managing the Whole Person – Neurodiversity' was a particularly impactful event where colleagues, including a trainee on the Graduate Management Training Scheme, shared personal workplace experiences and the management support that made a difference.

**Stepping into Leadership:** designed for colleagues exploring or transitioning into leadership roles, to develop essential skills such as people management and change leadership. 'Stepping into Leadership: Leading Without Line Managing' explored personal experiences of how leadership skills can also flourish in roles without formal line management.

**Getting the Best From:** practical and engaging, these events explore how to get the most from everyday opportunities including 1:1 meetings, networking, and performance reviews. An annual session 'Getting the Best from Performance and Development Reviews' remains a well-attended session and provides Professional Services colleagues with practical guidance and support for their yearly review.





# College and Divisional activities

Centrally-run Birmingham Professional activities are complemented by locally tailored initiatives across colleges and divisions that ensure professional development is relevant and responsive to the priorities of each area. A selection of these are shown here.

**External Relations** hosted sessions on line management, wellbeing and innovation. The Me in Three event 'Thinking Creatively about your Progression' encouraged colleagues to reflect on their career progression and considered how to make the most of secondments and lateral moves.

**Academic Services** responded to staff feedback by delivering targeted Digital Skills sessions focused on boosting personal productivity through tools such as Power Automate and CoPilot, as well as a foundational Excel session.

The **College of Arts and Law** held a Professional Services Conference with sessions on wellbeing, digital skills and productivity, and panel sessions. Academic colleagues shared their innovative research and explored the future of arts and humanities. The event was warmly received by staff and will return in 2026.

Bespoke sessions on Performance and Development Reviews were delivered by the **College of Medicine and Health**, which resulted in positive engagement with the PDR process. A series of targeted sessions were held with the Director of Operations for colleagues in Grade 2-5 roles, followed by two dedicated sessions for their line managers.

The **College of Social Sciences** hosted Andy Cope from 'The Art of Brilliance' for a session based on the science of positive psychology. Focused on raising aspirations, boosting resilience, and embracing change, this event reinforced the commitment to prepare staff for change and foster a supportive work environment.

A joint event, 'Making the most of...Networking' was co-hosted by colleagues from **Dubai** and **Edgbaston** campuses. Held simultaneously, this session featured staff sharing personal experiences and practical advice, highlighted shared challenges and strategies, and strengthened the connection across campuses.





# Technical Academy

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**The Technical Academy is a branch of Birmingham Professional and champions our technicians working in all disciplines and at all grades. As well as providing a vehicle for professional growth, it creates a sense of identity and belonging, enhancing the visibility of the work of this – sometimes overlooked – essential community. Governance and strategic direction are provided by a dedicated group chaired by the PVC Research and the Director of Operations for the College of Medicine and Health.**

One of the highlights of the last year was the Facilities Showcase Event, an inspiring day of events designed by members of the Academy that brought technicians together through guided tours of key research spaces and 'Me in Three' sessions from field experts. Members also have access to externally run events.

The Technical Academy is proud to have pledged to the Technician Commitment, a sector-wide initiative that sets out to:

- Raise awareness of technicians' contributions both inside and outside of the University
- Provide clear career pathways and resources for professional growth
- Enable technicians to have access to training and development
- Ensure tools are available to line managers to support career progression and succession planning

# Birmingham Professional Activity 2024 – 2025

## March 2024

- Managing the Whole Person: Neurodiversity Part 2
- How to pass 'GO!' - Unlocking our community chest to hear how to get your change project or idea over the starting line

## April 2024

- Demystifying Student Experience
- Getting the Best From: Networking
- Demystifying Research

## May 2024

- Demystifying Finance
- College of Medicine and Health: Ask the Senior Management Team
- College of Social Sciences: The Art of Brilliance

## August 2024

- Three trainees completed the Graduate Management Training Scheme and moved on to roles within the University



## July 2024

- Getting the Best From: Toolkits and Guidance
- Benefits-led Change: How identifying benefits early maximises project success

## June 2024

- Getting the Best From: Team Meetings
- Birmingham Professional Forum
- Birmingham Professional Awards
- Stepping into Leadership: Leading Without Line Managing



## September 2024

- New trainee cohort began the Graduate Management Training Scheme
- Technical Academy: Facilities Showcase



## October 2024

- College of Arts and Law: Birmingham Professional Forum
- Me in Three: Black History Month
- PA Network: In Conversation with Dan Skermer, Founder of PA Forum

## November 2024

- Birmingham Professional Forum
- Demystifying our Student Experience: Wellbeing and Academic Skills
- Getting the Best From: Coaching and Mentoring
- Demystifying Sustainability



## February 2025

- External Relations: Digital DownloadER
- College of Medicine and Health: Personal Development Review session for Line Managers

## January 2025

- National Technician Development Centre Partner Forum

## December 2024

- Academic Services: Digital Skills Sessions on Power Automate, CoPilot and Excel
- Me in Three: Learning while Earning
- Festive Forum
- PA Network: AI - Insights and Ideas in Action



## March 2025

- Getting the Best From: Personal Development Reviews

## April 2025

- Birmingham Professional Forum
- Demystifying Compact
- PA Network: the Evolution of the Assistant Role -in collaboration with the University of Oxford
- External Relations - Me in Three: Thinking Creatively about your Progression



## May 2025

- Birmingham Professional Forum
- Birmingham Professional Awards





# Celebrating success

## Local Recognition Awards

**A core component of Birmingham Professional is recognising and celebrating the vital contributions of colleagues across the University.**

At a local level, all colleges and divisions have recognition schemes that celebrate the successes - big or small - of colleagues undertaking great work. These are tailored to the work calendar of each area but are generally open throughout the

year and welcome nominations from colleagues within their area as well as from academics and Professional Services colleagues from across the University. Each area will periodically assess nominations and will select and announce winners who then receive a reward for their work.

This year over 2,000 nominations were made to local recognition schemes, with over 300 winners being selected and celebrated.

Each year, colleges and divisions will consider the winners from this scheme and will put forward a small number of local winners who have demonstrated exceptional excellence, usually involved in larger or more impactful work, to be considered for a Birmingham Professional Award (BPA).

**2000** local recognition scheme nominations

**300** local recognition scheme winners

**371** BPA nominations

**12** 12 BPA winners



**Erica Arthur and Hannah Lowe**, Birmingham Global - Birmingham Professional Award

This team successfully managed a complex project to develop and launch Ukraine's first Legal Dictionary, an initiative that embodies responsible business and supported the reconstruction of Ukraine's legal system.





## Birmingham Professional Awards

**Since 2008, we have run an annual awards event to showcase the dedication, innovation, and impact of Professional Services colleagues across the institution.**

Nominations are encouraged through two routes: the prestigious local recognition schemes within each college and division, and via open award categories that encourage applications for cross-University teams as well as for individuals. The categories this year were: Academics' Choice, Apprentice of the Year, Collaborative Working, Students at the Heart

of UoB, and Technician of the Year.

We received almost 400 high-quality nominations for the open awards, celebrating work from across the University, from large scale, high-profile projects, to exceptional local initiatives.

Panels are convened and tasked with selecting a shortlist and winner for each of the open awards plus five winners from the local recognition awards, each of whom receive a Birmingham Professional Award. Shortlisted nominees attend a prestigious celebration event, where the winners are announced and celebrated by their peers and senior leaders and where they receive a highly sought after engraved plant pot containing a plant from our own Winterbourne Garden!



**Warren Hitchmough,**  
Academic Services

- Collaborative  
Working Award

Warren was nominated by colleagues in Dubai for his leadership, advocacy, and personal oversight that ensured the successful inclusion of our Dubai campus in the StARS timetabling system.



**David Maitland-Smallman,**  
Life and Environmental Sciences

- Technician  
of the Year

David created a research facilities Canvas module for students and staff, which transformed access to critical information on the BSc Psychology in Education programme.



**Community Safety  
and Security Team,**  
Campus Services

- Registrar's Award

Winner of this prestigious inaugural award, a team of colleagues managed complex campus relations and events with professionalism and composure, helping students and staff to feel secure in a challenging year.



# Graduate Management Training Scheme

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With a strong track record of success since its launch in 2012, more than 50 trainees have been recruited to the Scheme.

**Our Graduate Management Training Scheme is the University's flagship talent development programme, providing ambitious and high-calibre graduates with an entry point into Higher Education leadership. The scheme is designed to develop flexible generalists who embrace change, create connections across the University, collaborate effectively and who are outstanding communicators.**

Management trainees rotate through placements over two years developing broad, adaptable skills to support their career growth. Placements also provide the University with additional capacity in key areas and trainee placements are highly sought after by colleagues. Trainees are supported by a line manager, a buddy who is usually a current trainee, and a mentor who is typically a member of the Registrar's Leadership Group. With a strong track record of success since its launch in 2012, more than fifty trainees have been recruited to the Scheme, with many alumni still thriving in diverse roles across the University and others working elsewhere in the sector.

Seven trainees are currently undertaking placements across the University, contributing to a wide range of strategic initiatives. This includes working on our 125 Anniversary celebrations, supporting colleges by identifying ways to streamline processes, working on Professional Services change and transformation projects, and supporting student recruitment activities in China, including working in-country.

Second years have undertaken projects supporting Research Functional Coordination, contributing to the development of the College of Social Sciences 2030 Strategy, developing proposals for expanding our graduation celebrations in

Edgbaston and internationally, contributing to digital teaching initiatives, and serving as Panel Secretary for the Strategic Review of Birmingham Law School. All trainees also provide essential secretarial support to institutional committees.

A role at the University is not guaranteed upon completion of the Scheme, however all trainees who wished to remain at the University have successfully secured a role upon completion of the Scheme, demonstrating its strong track record in developing accomplished professionals.



## Scheme Structure





A photograph of two women walking towards the camera in a modern office hallway. The woman on the left is Black, wearing a black headwrap, a green and white striped short-sleeved top, and blue jeans. The woman on the right is white, wearing a green patterned dress and a lanyard with a badge. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The hallway has large glass windows on the left and a wooden slatted ceiling with recessed lighting.

# Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice bring together colleagues with shared interests and expertise to connect, learn, and improve their skills. Engaging in a Community of Practice empowers Professional Services colleagues to develop existing skills or explore a new area, and by expanding their networks, cross-boundary working is facilitated, leading to more efficient and innovative ways of working.

## Key Communities of Practice include:

The **PA Network**, established by the Executive Office, is a member-led community for colleagues working in personal assistant, executive support, or office/team administrator roles. Events tailored to community needs are run throughout the academic year. A session exploring the practical use of AI in these roles was a particularly well attended session this year.

IT Services hosts the **Digital Community of Practice**, aligned to the Digital Strategy. Colleagues exchange knowledge, useful tips, and engage in discussions on technology that supports digital development and confidence.

Change is vital to the ongoing success and sustainability of the University. The **Change Community of Practice** run by Strategic Programmes and Change, supports line managers, leaders, and project managers to share experiences through the planning, delivery and evaluation of change initiatives.



# The Future of Birmingham Professional

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**Since its inception in 2010, Birmingham Professional has become a well-established and valued part of the University and has been copied by other universities.**

A revitalised plan for the forthcoming years will see the continuation of some of Birmingham Professional's most valued activities and will offer new opportunities in areas of emerging priority. This will include sessions focused on digital skills development that will enhance innovative working and increased personal productivity, and a new suite of sessions to develop skills in planning and implementing change.

Thank you to everyone who has been involved in developing and delivering Birmingham Professional activity over the last year. And a particular thank you to Lee Sanders, Registrar, Secretary and COO, who established Birmingham Professional in 2010 and has overseen its success for the past 15 years.







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