

# VISION 2021-26 OUR CORPORATE STRATEGY



**Birkbeck**  
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

LONDON'S EVENING UNIVERSITY

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# VISION 2021-26

## OUR CORPORATE STRATEGY

'Vision 2021-26', Birkbeck's five-year corporate strategy, builds on its history, mission, values, and key strengths, repositioning it in the London and UK Higher Education sector so it continues to grow, thrive, and transform lives in its third century.

### Our Mission

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Birkbeck is a university which:

- **transforms lives through inspiring teaching that is accessible and inclusive**
- **addresses challenges and changes in our world through outstanding research**
- **stands out for its contribution to social mobility and lifelong learning.**



We provide educational opportunities that combine access with quality. We aim to transform lives through providing education that is accessible to all who can benefit from it.

We provide flexible higher education courses which meet the changing educational, cultural, personal and career needs of students of all ages and particularly those who live or work in the London region and those who combine study with work, caring or other commitments.

We provide access routes for students of all ages from diverse social and educational backgrounds to participate in our courses.

Our programmes are delivered by leading researchers and practitioners and have the highest possible academic quality, and we aim to deliver them in ways that maximise the success of a diverse and disadvantaged student body.

We aim to maintain and develop excellence in research and provide the highest quality research training in all our subject areas.

We make available the results of research, and the expertise acquired, through teaching, publication, partnerships with other organisations and the promotion of civic and public debate.

We are a university with equality and diversity at our heart, in keeping with our founding mission.

We aim to provide outstanding access to taught programmes and world leading research, and to be sector leading in our contribution to social mobility and community development in the localities which we serve.

# Our Values

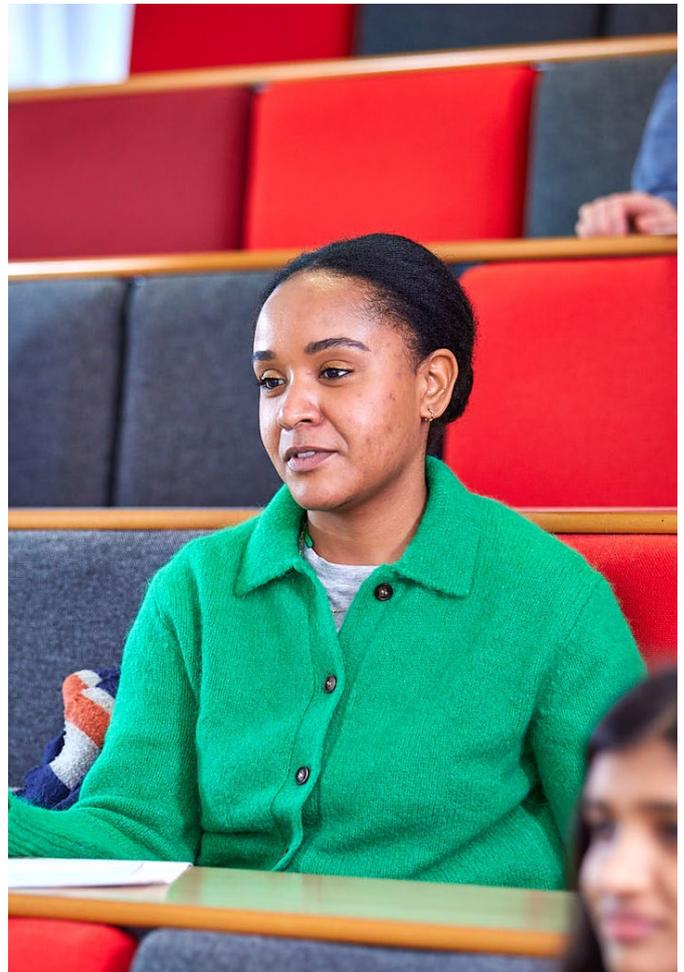
We exist for our students. To inspire and support them but also to be inspired by their commitment, strength of purpose, and the challenges they meet to study and succeed. We are committed to the value of higher education in its broadest sense, not in narrow definitions of it.

We exist to help students gain direct skills and knowledge to help them prosper but know we must do more than this. We are committed to: creating a learning community inside and outside the classroom, among students as well as between students and teachers; developing social, as well as intellectual capital; and helping our students have agency and impact – to challenge, question, contribute and reason in a difficult world. We are vocal advocates for our current and future students in a policy and funding environment that, will often neglect their interests as it tends to the mainstream.

As a University of Sanctuary, we are committed to creating an institution where everyone feels safe, welcome, and able to pursue their right to education. This includes a long history of welcoming refugees, asylum-seekers and scholars who are fleeing persecution.

Research is just as much a part of our DNA as our teaching. Research matters across each and every one of our disciplines and it matters in making a positive difference to society. Good research comes from empowered researchers, from the broadest base of contribution and takes time, sustained attention and resource.

Research and teaching are linked. Sometimes that link is direct, most often it is not because it relates to the 'how' of teaching in a research-focused institution, not the 'what'. We value an environment where knowledge isn't just served up to be absorbed but challenged and questioned too.



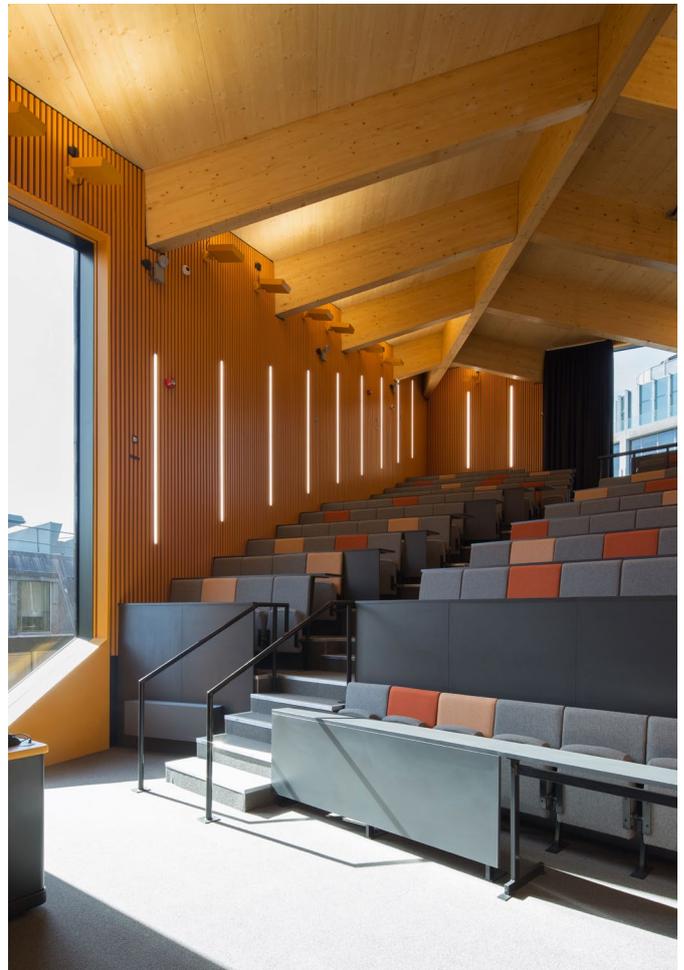
# Into Birkbeck's Third Century

Launched in 2021, ahead of our 200th anniversary in 2023, this corporate strategy sets out plans for ambitious change.

Our ambitions follow from our history, mission and values but delivering them will reposition Birkbeck within London and the UK Higher Education sector.

This strategy outlines a transformation in what we offer our students and our staff, through changes to our working environment and organisational practices. We will:

- 1. Create a 'connected campus', combining state-of-the-art teaching and research facilities supported by an excellent digital infrastructure and providing the informal and social spaces which build social capital, trust and inclusion.**
- 2. Provide high quality, flexible education through a blend of inspirational face-to-face events and modern digital learning, so that students of all backgrounds can fulfil their ambitions.**
- 3. Harness outstanding research to produce knowledge which can help comprehend, challenge, and change the world we are living in, and aim to enhance the impact of our research and public engagement.**
- 4. Empower staff through increased flexibility in working practices, a sector leading commitment to equality and diversity, clarity and transparency over workload expectations, and simplified administrative, management and decision-making processes.**



Vision 2021-26 is written at a time where the financial sustainability of many UK Universities is under sustained pressure. Birkbeck itself is facing a severe immediate challenge. We must move out of a pattern of recurrent tactical crisis response and undertake a fundamental rebasing exercise, repositioning Birkbeck within the London and wider higher education sector.

The cumulative impact will be not only to address Birkbeck's financial sustainability, but also to move the university to a higher operating equilibrium, with a more competitive educational offer better attuned to the needs of our students and more efficient in its delivery. The aim is to create an institution in which:

- students can succeed through a model of flexible high-quality teaching, combining inspirational campus experiences with online learning and support in a dynamic blend
- staff and students will feel a sense of pride and belonging in a consolidated Bloomsbury campus, whilst benefiting from the connectivity allowed by our digital infrastructure
- there are quantifiable improvements in student recruitment, retention and satisfaction
- staff can benefit from agile working underpinned by clarity about workload expectations
- there are tangible improvements in equality, diversity, and inclusion metrics for both staff and students
- improvements in both space use and internal structures and processes will deliver significant efficiencies in the cost base
- there continues to be a diverse research grant portfolio and there are enhanced future Research Excellence Framework (REF) returns and strategies to deliver knowledge exchange through corporate, civic, and public engagement
- we will clearly stand out in the higher education sector for our commitment to, advocacy for, and delivery of lifelong learning.

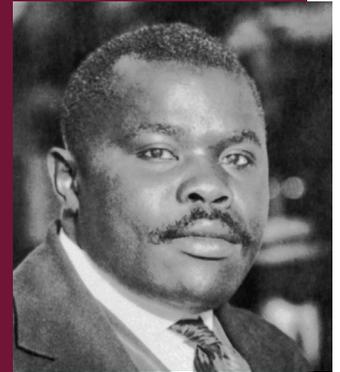
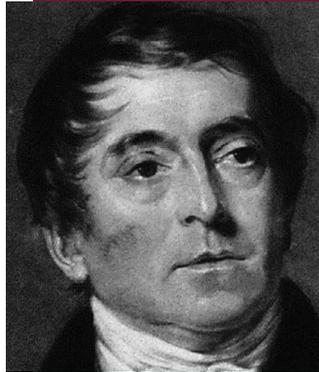


# The Moment

## Foundation:

*"Now is the time for the universal benefits of the blessings of knowledge."*

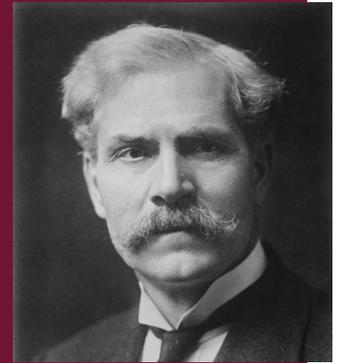
George Birkbeck, 1823



## Centenary:

*"To the many who otherwise are walled in by the limits of their own occupations, Birkbeck College stands as a gateway, through which each day they may adventure into the wide fields of Learning and Opportunity. The horizon opens without barrier of race or nationality, beckoning the student on to wider understanding and wider friendships."*

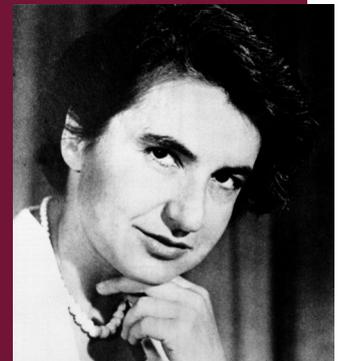
James Ramsay MacDonald, 1923



## Approaching the bicentenary:

*"A centre of evening education at the highest level is as essential to a world city as a good transport system, especially to a city that attracts ambitious people. There is still no other place like Birkbeck in the metropolis."*

Eric Hobsbawm, 2013



Over two centuries of remarkable achievements Birkbeck has demonstrated time after time the resilience, determination, and sense of purpose to adapt and move forward. Its alumni have remarkable breadth, exhibiting a diversity of radicalisms, their uniting factor a willingness to overturn barriers of class, race and gender. Birkbeck is a university that can proudly embrace Annie Besant and Marcus Garvey, Dame Helen Gwynne-Vaughan, and Rosalind Franklin, as well as the luminaries quoted above.

The scale of change taking place around us means that Birkbeck, once again, needs to respond and renew.



Contemporary structures of work and domesticity mean that an 'evening class' model does not in and of itself widen access. The nature of the walls limiting opportunity are very different now from in the past. The nature of social class has fundamentally shifted with deindustrialisation and automation. The vectors of occupational and geographical mobility have changed, and gender, religion and ethnicity are now as important as occupational identity. In our digital world, however, universal blessings have not followed automatically or directly from easier dissemination. Instead, we face fundamental challenges about authority and expertise, and these in turn pose unanswered questions about the role of universities.

The terrain of higher education policy has also been shifting as universities have found themselves at the centre of political debate. Birkbeck, operating in the most crowded student market in the world, has faced major systemic challenges, including a sharp Brexit impact. Escalating competition around our core teaching mission, alongside major funding and regulatory changes, have created urgent pressures in terms of financial sustainability.

The Covid pandemic led to an extended period of crisis-led response and innovation which demanded all our focus and energy, with Birkbeck coming together rapidly and successfully. We chose to pause, consult, and reflect on the lessons of our pandemic response.

The result of that extended process is a vision of a Birkbeck reinvigorated, a world of learning in the midst of the world of affairs, proud of its past and confident in its mission, prepared to take bold and exciting steps in reinventing itself.

# Repositioning Birkbeck

This strategy reaffirms Birkbeck's mission and values but it proposes that significant changes in how we organise ourselves and deliver our core educational activities are necessary if we are to address challenges ahead and seize emerging opportunities.

The twin, interlocked shocks of Brexit and Covid are already emerging as the agents of economic rebasing, particularly in London, and we have seen this begin to play out in terms of major shifts in student demand over the past two years. Birkbeck should take advantage of its position to drive change through the provision of more innovative research and teaching, including lifelong learning provision with a reskilling and upskilling rationale.

A post-Brexit, post-Covid London will need more of Birkbeck, and more from Birkbeck, from bitesize skills courses to ground-breaking research programmes. However, Government policy towards higher education remains ambivalent and in many ways challenging towards our agenda and if we cannot succeed in meeting emerging educational needs, we will be overtaken by the many competitor higher education providers operating in London. We are ranked fourth among UK universities for our contribution to social mobility and the average earnings of our graduates are higher than those of Russell Group graduates: we must continue to make the case for the value we add to the lives of our students and their communities.

Our bicentenary offers the potential for major philanthropic fundraising to support the next phase of Birkbeck's development, as well as provide a high-profile opportunity for a 'relaunch' of a more focused, competitive offer to our prospective students. Allied to this is the completion of a new teaching facility at 373 Euston Road and the acquisition of the 'Birkbeck Central' building and the transformative impact on our estate now that we own a contiguous run of properties around Torrington Square.

After the forced move to online teaching and service delivery during the Covid pandemic, we also have the opportunity to blend in greater online flexibility to complement and supplement the inspiring face-to-face teaching for which we are known. We can create a new integrated model for educational access and lifelong learning. Our proud model of research-led teaching delivered to diverse, engaged, and questioning classes can make its benefits felt more broadly and deeply.

We will offer students up-front clarity and significant flexibility, so that they can make advanced decisions based on an informed understanding of when and how they can study and so be empowered to take greater control over their educational journey.



We will include a wider range of enhancement and enrichment activities and support services, accessible on a flexible basis in a variety of forms and a rich blend of social and peer learning, informal interactions, and extra-curricular opportunities.

We will also look to create a Birkbeck lifelong learning account for each of our students and within this, provide discounts and incentives to support our life-long learners committing to Birkbeck, whether through progressing to full degrees, topping up by taking individual modules, or undertaking continuing professional development (CPD) and skills acquisition.

Building on our current strong position as an institution of choice for part-time adult learners, we can and should become more than a marginal player for the full-time undergraduates combining commuting to university alongside other commitments, who have come to dominate London higher education. We also can and should capitalise on our academic reputation to become a major destination for full-time postgraduates in and around London.

As we approach our bicentenary, we have the opportunity to build an inclusive and inspiring campus environment at a nodal point in the public transport network of both the capital and the nation, in a locale rich with cultural and historical resonance.

We have identified a large and growing body of students in and around London, and globally, whose ambitions and expectations align with our mission and values. Undertaking a major repositioning exercise involving major changes to our operating model is a challenge, especially with the financial and time pressures we face. Equally, we are already seeing a willingness to mobilise collectively and to deliver a new model of educational access and lifelong learning, making Birkbeck relevant for the new London emerging after Brexit and Covid. The coming years are emerging as some of the most challenging in Birkbeck's long history. They can also be foundational.

