

BBK

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RESONATING WITH THE WORLD

Critically acclaimed theatre director Atri Banerjee on how his work examines human behaviour. Photo of Look Back in Anger performance by Marc Brenner.

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WELCOME FROM OUR NEW PRESIDENT

Education has the power to transform lives.

This is particularly evident at Birkbeck with its mission to make high-quality education accessible to all who may benefit from it – no matter what their background or circumstance.

I'm so honoured to be appointed Birkbeck's 17th President at such a pivotal moment for our world. My experience in human rights and higher education combined with Birkbeck's mission to reach out to traditionally under-represented groups seems such a good fit. Why? Because as with human rights, everyone believes in the best education for themselves and their families. The test is whether they would guarantee these invaluable treasures for everyone else.

Birkbeck's role in higher education is a very special one and the need to amplify its message is increasingly important. This is especially true when the known benefits of higher study are openly challenged in the media and in political discourse.

That's why I am so proud to succeed the incredible Baroness Joan Bakewell as President. I look forward to championing Birkbeck's work and celebrating the

way it remains true to its founding mission. The impact of Birkbeck's history and responsibility is clearly felt throughout the university today.

It is also thanks to our supporters that we can continue our commitment to ensuring access to higher education, supporting our talented students and enhancing our world-leading research. This generosity allows us to thrive. As well as celebrating its history, Birkbeck also looks to the future, constantly innovating to meet the evolving needs of the student community.

In this latest edition of BBK, our alumni and supporter magazine, you can discover how we have developed a new MA in AI, Ethics and Society in response to the ethical, philosophical and social questions that arise from advancements in artificial intelligence. Read more from the course leader Alex Grzankowski on pages 20 and 21.

Birkbeck continues to introduce cutting-edge technology to ensure its students are at the forefront of these advancements and enhancing their employability. Find out more about how both students and alumni can benefit from the Immersive Learning Centre on pages 24 and 25.

In a conversation between Professor Sally Wheeler, Vice-Chancellor of Birkbeck, and William Sarenden, chair of Birkbeck's Students' Union, on pages eight and nine, you will gain an insight into the student experience of today, how Birkbeck currently supports its students and how we plan to evolve that support over the coming years.

As part of Birkbeck's ongoing commitment to provide students with high-quality, state-of-the-art learning spaces and facilities in the heart of London, new student lounges have been created in our Malet Street building and at Birkbeck Central, as well as 14 new HyFlex-enabled classrooms. Check out these spaces on page 34.

Our dedicated alumni volunteers – of which there are more than 600 – make a huge difference in how we support our diverse and talented students, helping them make the most of their time at university as they embark on their future careers. I know many of you regularly dedicate your time to giving back to Birkbeck through our essential mentoring programmes. Your support is invaluable.

As well as updating you on university news and research advancements, this magazine will also introduce you to our global community of change-makers. Take Becky Cotton as just one example, who you will meet on pages 18 and 19. As an MRes Government, Policy and Politics alumna, she is developing unique support for women's health problems, specifically symptoms of menopause.

I hope you enjoy reading about the impact of our community and it inspires you to be an even more active member of it.

The Rt Hon Baroness Chakrabarti CBE PC

BIRKBECK CHANGES LIVES



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 Taking the step to enrol at Birkbeck can open new avenues. Birkbeck alumnus Philippe Mandangi (LLM 2020) spent over a decade employed in retail and now works in policy, research and analysis at the House of Commons. As a way of giving back, he remains actively engaged with the Birkbeck community.

At the time of applying to Birkbeck, Philippe was a full-time department manager for Sainsbury's, having spent 11 years working in retail. He was always interested in studying law, but having come from Congo as a refugee, he had a lot to learn about the UK's system. Given his department manager role, he also needed to be flexible with his schedule. What Birkbeck offered particularly suited his lifestyle requirements. "I did find it very challenging", commented Philippe, "but I stuck to a strict regime because I was focused on finishing my degree and changing careers".

"We need to share opportunities and experiences"

Studying at Birkbeck has changed Philippe's life. Following his studies, he was originally looking to become a researcher. However, on joining the House of Commons, his professional trajectory led him towards policy and

analysis. Always keen to learn and expand his network, more recently Philippe has embarked on another degree on parliamentary procedures, which is certified by City, University of London, and is delivered by Parliament. "It will help me to become a specialist clerk advising MPs on procedures", he anticipates. Philippe's long-term ambition is to go back to Congo and contribute to improving of the political system there.

At the start of his studies at Birkbeck, Philippe took the initiative to secure a mentoring relationship with Birkbeck Law Professor Daniel Monk. Consequently, his own ambition is now to make sure nobody is left behind. "We need to share opportunities and experiences", he says. "You can never anticipate when you will need someone you know at some point in the future." This is why his recommendation to current students is to find out what support there is to make university easier. "After understanding your course and what you have to do for your studies, explore the programmes Birkbeck has put in place for your development and wellbeing", he encourages.

Having remained actively engaged with Birkbeck and our community, Philippe now mentors and shares his experiences with both final-year and international Birkbeck students through the Mentoring Pathways

and Global Buddies programmes. "The first student I mentored is now working as a solicitor and we are still in touch", he says. When they first met, the student had just come from Pakistan and was working for Uber whilst also attending classes at Birkbeck. The student had been a lawyer in Pakistan and then started getting some experience here. Before he even finished at Birkbeck, he was assisting a firm of solicitors. "It gave me quite a lot of satisfaction to see him succeed", shares Philippe.

In addition to supporting the Birkbeck community through mentoring, Philippe also took a group of six international students to Parliament. "I was able to show them some areas that the general public can't get access to when Parliament is not sitting", he said.

With students from over 120 countries, Birkbeck is a truly international university in a global city. Philippe's generous contribution enhanced the already wide range of annual opportunities for international students, so they can meet with others and feel part of our friendly community of students, staff and dedicated alumni.

Birkbeck's Mentoring Pathways programme connects final-year students with alumni and corporate volunteers for guidance, advice and support to navigate the steps into their future careers and professional development goals. Global Buddies connects Birkbeck alumni with new international students during their first term of study to help them settle in.



THE ETHICS OF DIGITAL BANKING

.....
 Dr Ammar Sammour has been investigating the ethics of new financial products, which are increasingly being shaped by artificial intelligence and adopted by young people.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning are among the key technologies driving the fintech industry, powering the majority of products and services.

With these technological advancements, Dr Ammar Sammour, Lecturer in Birkbeck's Business School and Head of the Marketing subject group, is concerned about the protection of customer data, and how people may unwittingly be exploited.

"Data gathered by banks can be used in an unethical way without customers' awareness and consent, with some banks even being reliant on third-party providers to manage data", Dr Sammour explains. "A 2022 report by the European Commission flagged the potential for AI-driven financial systems to exploit consumer data to create unfair lending practices, such as offering different rates based on a person's online behaviour or data profile. There are limited studies focused on AI ethical issues related to fintech, so AI security and the associated risk around sensitive customer data urgently need to be understood."

Dr Sammour is particularly interested in how young people are rapidly adopting the smart technology, and their attitudes towards security and risk associated with using

banking platforms. In the UK, there are estimated to be over 7 million 16–24-year-olds, offering a huge pool of potential customers for financial institutions.

"Data gathered by banks can be used in an unethical way without customers' awareness and consent"

Conducting a survey of 783 people, of which the majority (73%) were aged under 24 years, Dr Sammour found that 84% often used AI-based banking services. "The results demonstrated that while people are aware of the risk of using innovative platforms, they generally do not consider AI security as an important factor in dealing with banking platforms, which is concerning", said Dr Sammour.

Calling for proper regulation of AI security and ethical standards within fintech companies to protect customer data is a core mission of Dr Sammour's. Meeting regularly with the UK Government to share his concerns, he's asking for AI ethics rules to be set up to avoid any risk and build data protection for younger users. He said: "The government must closely monitor AI-based risk management processes and cybersecurity audits in the banking sector. Virtual banks should adhere to central bank regulations and provide full access to their databases, alongside regularly updated internal policies outlining how they secure customer transactions and data.

"The government is continuously reviewing the recently introduced AI Ethics Guidelines and strengthening data protection laws such as GDPR. This could include more rigorous consent mechanisms and safeguarding practices for data collected from younger users. I've suggested launching public awareness campaigns to educate parents, guardians and young users about the risks posed by AI-driven platforms, while also encouraging academic collaboration to develop standards and best practices for ethical AI deployment."



STRIVING TO AVOID CAUSING HARM TO SOCIETY

Kendall Reid (MSc Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, 2022) has held leadership roles in environment, sustainability and governance (ESG) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) for 15 years. As the Director of ESG for cyber security consultancy firm S-RM, she provides strategic advice to investment teams and corporates. She talks about how helping businesses to champion environment and sustainability and how we can all make meaningful impact.

Tell us about your upbringing in Australia and what made you move to the UK and pursue a career in ESG?

I grew up by the sea in Sydney. My parents always taught us to be grateful and did a lot of charity work. I have always been fascinated by current affairs and politics.

I got into a philosophy, economics and politics degree, then I did a gap year and travelled around Europe. After finishing my degree, I did some charity work with Mission Australia and I worked as a university tutor –

one of the most rewarding things I have done.

I really wanted to work in London, so I applied for every job I could find. I ended up at Merrill Lynch in Asset Management (a very lucky break) and then at UBS. I absolutely loved London and my job, but I knew I wanted to do something that was meaningful, but in a corporate environment.

A friend suggested corporate social responsibility. I had no idea what that was so I looked it up and it sounded great. I did a course at the

UN and then eventually found a job in corporate social responsibility. I hopped around a lot, working in Singapore, Doha, Dubai, Hong Kong, Sydney and London

“I knew I wanted to do something that was meaningful”

Why has environment, sustainability and social responsibility been particularly important to you?

I think it was the charity and philanthropy work my parents did, and encouraged us to do, as well as my obsession with news and current affairs. When you watch a lot of news you see a lot of injustice in the world, and – however idealistic this sounds – perhaps you want to play your own small part in providing some kind of remedy.

“We all do our own bit in our own way, and that is the most important thing”

I am certainly not perfect and there is a lot of cognitive dissonance in my life – while I work in the ESG industry, I am not a vegetarian, I fly a lot as I travel for work and for holidays. I could be doing a lot more. But we all do our own bit in our own way, and that is the most important thing.

It appealed to me to help businesses operate in a more socially responsible and sustainable way. For me and my skillset, I felt like business is where I could add the most value. ESG touches all parts of a business, so you get to meet so many bright people across interesting teams, and you get a great insight into how business works.

What made you choose to study the MSc in Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability at Birkbeck?

This course had a great reputation amongst colleagues. It was also certainly the location of the university and the flexibility. Mostly, it was the subject matter that appealed to me. I take a very business-centred approach to sustainability.

Things like International Business Strategy, Business Ethics, Corporate Responsibility, Legal Perspectives on Corporate Governance and Research Methodology form the foundations for the degree, and these are really core parts of good ESG practice.

I found the degree to be really useful, and I met a lot of great people in my industry. I did my research thesis on the top ten FTSE companies and their ESG programmes prior to and during COVID. I think that was beneficial to understanding corporate dynamics. I thoroughly enjoyed my time at Birkbeck and feel very grateful.

Tell us more about your current role at S-RM?

In corporate intelligence we do a lot of due diligence on behalf of private equity (PE) firms and banks, including ESG due diligence. This might be looking at a company’s environmental and social footprint, including vetting their supply chains. We do ESG strategy and programme building for both PE and corporates, and help with their reporting and communications to ensure they are compliant with global legislation.

We focus a lot on social sustainability, including community programmes, data privacy and cyber security, diversity, equity and inclusion, supply chains and social impact. We are very big on technology and AI, so we do some really interesting things there. For example, on a recent human rights project we used heat mapping and satellite imagery to track the movements of people to determine whether there were human rights abuses occurring on particular sites. Every day is really interesting!

What would you say businesses could do to champion ESG every day?

I do think firms need to be accountable for their behaviour and the only way to do this is for us to truly understand supply chain dynamics. This is a really important part of ESG.

Many companies will only put real effort into programmes that can provide a return on investment and will maximise or value shareholder return. And so when I am designing

ESG programmes I will always ensure that they have a sound business case and provide some kind of material impact.

What advice would you give to those considering working in the field of ESG?

I think it is a great career and I am always happy to talk to people about the best way to go into it. If you can get some kind of formal education in ESG then that is great, however I don’t think it is explicitly necessary.

What I do believe quite strongly is that it is important to be practical and pragmatic about the way you approach ESG, and understand the commerciality and sometimes harsh realities of ESG application. I know a lot of people who are so passionate about it, but they find themselves disheartened by what they perceive to be a lack of progress or success.

“Rather than being disheartened by the state of the world, embrace it”

I think, especially in our current geopolitical context, with much unrest, with so much populism in politics and with big pushbacks on ESG agendas, whether it be from governments like the Trump administration or lobbyist groups or groups of investors, it is very important to be sensible in the way we approach ESG.

Programmes will generally not get off the ground unless you can show a return on investment or a commercial return, or unless you are mitigating a risk to revenue, operations or reputation. And there are some wonderful ways we can do that now, especially with all of the data and technology available to us, so rather than being disheartened by the state of the world, embrace it.

“Firms need to be accountable for their behaviour”



CHAT WITH THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

William Sarenden, Chair of Birkbeck Students' Union and BA Philosophy student, sits down with Professor Sally Wheeler OBE, Vice-Chancellor of Birkbeck, to gain an insight into her role and her daily life. They discuss how she hopes to shape the student experience at Birkbeck as the University embarks on its third century.

William: What does a typical day look like for you as the Vice-Chancellor and what aspects of your role would most surprise people?

Sally: People would be surprised by the very varied sorts of meetings I go to, including, for example, with Birkbeck members of staff on internal matters or with alumni and supporters and people from other parts of the University of London. I also attend many different events. There's no such thing as a typical day. I think people would be surprised that I don't have an office – I share an office – plus, I still do bits and pieces of academic work.

William: What do you see as the biggest challenges facing Birkbeck students today?

Sally: For a number of students, financial pressures sadly impact both their ability to access higher education and their time studying with us much more than we would like. Many students face challenges relating to their mental health and wellbeing. We do have comprehensive counselling and learning support for students, which is really important.

A big challenge for all students nowadays is time. Time to try and balance work, studies and things in life in general and how much time to work on your CV and skills to make yourself more rounded. The overwhelming majority of students are working, so time and time management must be a challenge. Students start thinking about their employment prospects before they even arrive. There is that continuous pressure to achieve and find time to fit things in.

William: What are your views on how the Government could better support universities like Birkbeck to make education more accessible?

Sally: I would like to see something done about the clear distinction between a full-time and part-time student. In most Australian universities, which I have experience of from my time as Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Australian National University, students can switch between full and part-time study with ease. This is much more difficult in the English system where students are funded on an annual, not modular, basis at present.

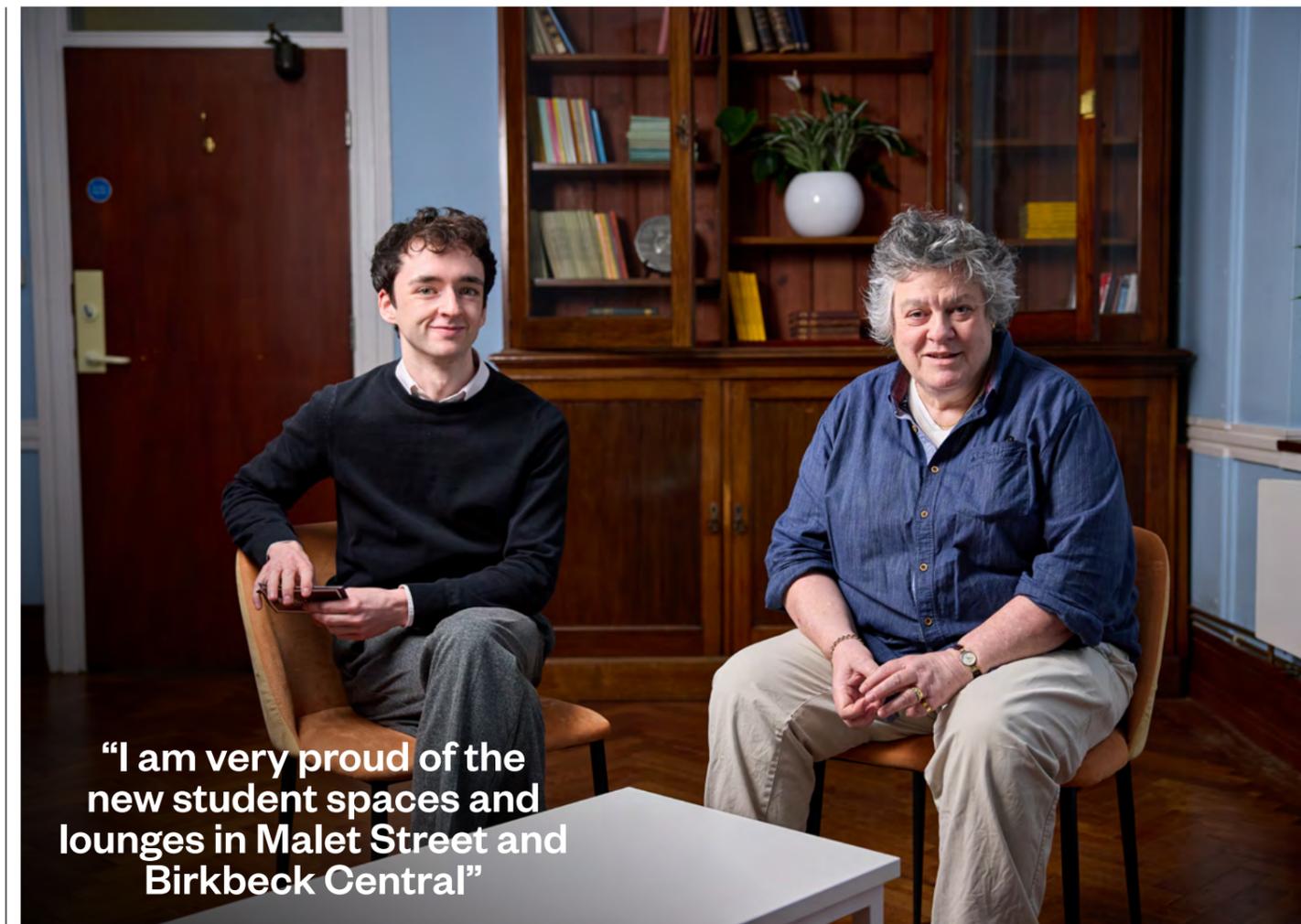
I think you produce students that are much more rounded, ready for the workplace and more at ease with themselves if you give them more time to complete their degrees instead of the traditional model of completing within three years. It doesn't cost the Government more money but for students it can be genuinely transformational.

I also think that business of 'what is a graduate salary?' is very misleading. If you have a student that earns £30,000 but is in a family of one or two generations of worklessness, that salary is transformational. We should be looking at what we mean by social mobility rather than the salary.

"I teach each semester and I hope to do that every year"

William: How does the university help students enhance their social mobility, and why do you think this is such an important focus for Birkbeck?

Sally: We're known for our contribution to social mobility partly because we have such a positive approach to accepting 'non-traditional' students, which includes mature learners and those without the traditional qualifications some other universities ask for. Our students not only gain knowledge of the subject they're studying and transferrable skills, they also get the chance to mix with people who are so different and at different points in their career. It's about raising ambition.



"I am very proud of the new student spaces and lounges in Malet Street and Birkbeck Central"

William: Reflecting on your time so far as Vice-Chancellor, what is it that you are you most proud of?

Sally: There's lots of things I am really proud of – even just saying that I am Vice-Chancellor of Birkbeck. I think we do graduations very well and it's incredible to see that many students all together on the way to the next stage of their lives. I am very proud of the new student spaces and lounges in Malet Street and Birkbeck Central. I think it's great to have that space for our time-poor students to come together. *Take a look at our new student spaces on pages 33 and 34.*

William: What advice would you give to students to help them maximise their academic, professional and personal development?

Sally: Hear from people in careers you are interested in. Speak with our alumni, who are a great source of information about making the most of your time at Birkbeck and beyond. We have several programmes students can get involved in to get valued support from alumni, for example Mentoring Pathways, Global Buddies and Careers Clinics. *Read more on page 16.*

Take advantage of anything that improves yourself. You can get a first-class degree but not be employable because you don't have those soft skills. And just go for it. Don't be afraid to try things you have never tried before.

William: We know you're a cat lover – how do your cats influence your work-life balance?

Sally: I have three ginger cats – Pumps 1, Pumps 4 and Pinky – and cats are realistic pets if you are out at work a lot. They accommodate my routine. We have coffee together in the morning and I have a sofa in my home office for them.

William: As you know, staying connected with students is vital. So how do you ensure you remain attuned to the views and concerns of the student body?

Sally: I still teach a class each semester and I hope to do that every year. Plus, I still use the student cafe and I regularly meet with you and your colleagues.

William: As someone familiar with Bloomsbury, do you have a favourite spot for a coffee or a quick bite between meetings?

Sally: I am on first name terms with the people at Store Street Espresso, particularly because I always buy the same thing, even though I always hesitate. I do use the Perch [on the ground floor of the Malet Street building] – they are always telling me off for how many chocolate bars I buy.



LOOKING AFTER WORKERS' WELLBEING

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Almuth McDowall, Professor of Organisational Psychology at Birkbeck, uses her research to focus on neurodiversity, wellbeing at work, coaching and professional competence. Her mission is to help businesses make their people happy, and her vision is for a world of work where everyone can thrive.
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“Organisations aren’t getting it right” when it comes to looking after workers’ wellbeing, says Almuth McDowall.

New research carried out by Birkbeck with Neurodiversity in Business (NiB) shows that levels of wellbeing are low for all UK workers but especially low for those who are neurodivergent. Some 78% of neurodivergent research participants report feeling overwhelmed at work.

“All of us can question our own assumptions”

The research, which this year involved interviewing colleagues at organisations as well as employers and employees, found that neurotypical colleagues were having increased career satisfaction and better experiences at work. It also found that they were not fully recognising the cognitive, sensory or relationship challenges experienced by their neurodivergent peers.

Over 1,600 people across organisations and sectors in the UK were involved in the research, which obtained perspectives from 1,436 neurodivergent workers, 132 employers and 123 neurotypical colleagues.

Almuth, the lead researcher, said the findings are important as 15 to 20 per cent of the UK adult population are neurodivergent, with the likelihood that many more people will be diagnosed over the next few years due to broader diagnostic criteria and increased public recognition.

“There is more awareness and self-advocacy in the general population. Stigma and prejudice are waning in younger people in particular,” she says.

According to Almuth, organisations must expect a diverse workforce and offer a holistic approach to prevent stress: “Our findings document that wellbeing was low for everybody – we think this is a compound impact of the cost-of-living crisis, everyone being affected by coming out of the pandemic as well as continuously shifting work contexts and demands.

“What organisations are doing at the moment is not hitting the spot. They are putting too much emphasis on secondary and tertiary interventions and not enough into primary interventions – we need to look at the root causes.”

Primary interventions are focused at addressing issues at source – designing jobs with a balanced workload but also appropriate variety, clear expectations and a good supportive environment. Secondary interventions involve improving the way workers respond to stress by providing skills to improve resilience, whereas tertiary interventions are aimed at improving the wellbeing of employees who have been made ill by their work.

Almuth says: “Wellbeing should never be an outcome for organisations. Looking after your people should permeate everything you do in an organisation.

“If people are well in themselves, they are going to be more productive and they are going to stay.”

The research report recommends that companies deliver an approach that goes beyond condition-specific initiatives and takes a preventative perspective. Recommendations include considering working conditions, such as preventing sensory overwhelm for neurodivergent workers, and to ensure that all workers are properly supported in hybrid and working from home conditions.

To avoid conflict at work, the report suggests building mutual

trust and understanding between neurodivergent workers and neurotypical colleagues. Employers should regularly review job design paired with effective neurodiversity training. Line manager support also helps to encourage neurodivergent workers to stay in an organisation.

According to Almuth, it is the responsibility of companies and employers to embed neuroinclusion in policies and practices.

She said: “Organisational and society climate and culture is important. You have to make it performance criteria for managers that they are managing wellbeing well, which should be benchmarked regularly.”

Neurodiverse people have so much to offer in the workplace, says Almuth, from innovative thinking to creative approaches: “They usually have some stand out capabilities and specific interests. Often you find they are really divergent thinkers and excel at dealing with complexity.

“If someone’s behaviour is a bit different, don’t assume they are faulty”

“The challenges can be about relationships. Some neurotypes, for example with autistic traits, can have difficulty reading social cues in others.

“We need to develop the awareness that people have very different strengths and challenges. It’s about recognising and harnessing these talents and giving people the benefit of the doubt. When you are working with someone with ADHD, you might not see regular performance and work rhythms, for example. There will be periods of intense activity and then they back off.

“But if they are delivering what they need to deliver, then does it actually matter? If it is impacting their work and their relationships, then an honest conversation needs to happen.”

WHAT OUR STUDENTS SAY



Eric Skidmore

MRes Early Modern History

Why did you choose Birkbeck?

I visited most of the universities comprising the University of London. Birkbeck was the only one to take a personal interest and invited me to submit a personal statement before I had made an application. The feedback was very helpful.

Where is your favourite place on campus?

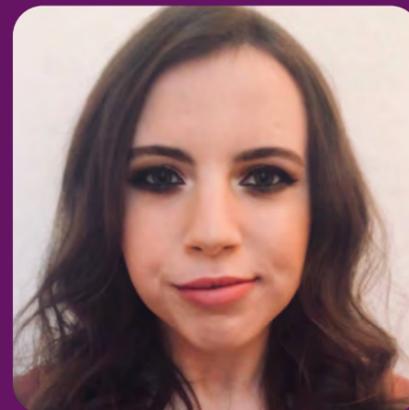
Where I am writing this now, the library.

What three words would you use to describe your time at Birkbeck so far?

Enjoyable, challenging, satisfying.

What is one piece of advice you would give to new students at Birkbeck?

The calibre of Birkbeck staff is such that you should not miss a lecture. Also don't be afraid to seek help and advice which, in my experience, is always there when you need it.



Ashling Gillespie

BA Arts and Media Management

Why did you choose Birkbeck?

I was going through a difficult time with my mental health, and it was my psychologist who recommended Birkbeck. When she mentioned that it offers evening-time study options, this piqued my interest. When I had my interview for the course, I felt so welcomed.

Favourite place on campus?

The library and Gordon Square. I like to unwind and enjoy these peaceful environments when doing my studies or chilling there before classes.

What three words would you use to describe your time at Birkbeck so far?

Encouraging, life-changing, inspiring.

What is one piece of advice you would give to new students at Birkbeck?

Do not be afraid to reach out for help, seek guidance if you are struggling. Birkbeck has been so supportive, and that support has showed me that I am far more capable than I give myself credit for.



Patrick Chimimba

MSc Sport Management and the Business of Football

Supported with a scholarship

Why did you choose Birkbeck?

I have always loved football, however growing up in one of the poorest countries, one had to prioritise school. Determined to do something sports related, I looked at the MSc Sports Management and the Business of Football programme at Birkbeck. With lessons in the evening, I get to do other things during the day.

Favourite place on campus?

I love being in the coffee shop under the library,

sitting on the raised stools, my laptop open, sipping my black tea, and watching all the people walk by.

What three words would you use to describe your time at Birkbeck so far?

Surreal, inspiring, fun.

What is one piece of advice you would give to new students at Birkbeck?

Enjoy Birkbeck, make friends, and always ask when in doubt.



Rosa Arian Shakib

BSc Psychology

Why did you choose Birkbeck?

I chose Birkbeck because of its flexibility. It allows me to balance my studies with other commitments. The evening classes make it possible for me to gain an education without compromising on professional growth or personal responsibilities.

Where is your favourite place on campus?

The library. The study spaces cater to different needs, whether you want a quiet spot to focus or

a group setting for collaboration. It's quiet, convenient and well-equipped for effective studying.

What three words would you use to describe your time at Birkbeck so far?

Flexible, supportive, rewarding.

What is one piece of advice you would give to new students at Birkbeck?

Engage with your peers and lecturers and don't hesitate to seek support when you need it – it's all there to help you succeed.

RESONATING WITH THE WORLD



Photo of *Look Back in Anger* by Marc Brenner.

Award-winning theatre director Atri Banerjee, 31 (MFA Theatre Directing, 2018), has just finished a production of ground-breaking play *Look Back in Anger* at the Almeida Theatre in London. He reflects on how he got his big break thanks to Birkbeck and how his work has shone a light on the darkest elements of human behaviour.

Why did you choose to study the MFA in Theatre Directing at Birkbeck?

I had been directing at school and at the University of Cambridge and I knew I wanted to pursue a career in theatre and arts.

During my time at university, I was the student assistant director on a production of *Henry V* at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, directed by professional West End Director Lisa Blair. She had done the MFA in Theatre Directing at Birkbeck and said I should do the course. When I left university, I was the press assistant at the National

Theatre and I met Director Lyndsey Turner. She had been in the second cohort and also said I should think about applying.

The thing that particularly appealed to me was that it was a really professional course. It included practical training in theatre directing, including a year-long placement at a working theatre. I spent mine at the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester.

A year after graduating, you received the The Stage Debut Award for your production of *Hobson's Choice* at the Royal Exchange Theatre. What did it mean to you?

I did the placement at the Royal Exchange with Director Sarah Frankcom. I assisted her on two shows and I developed a very close relationship with her and the building. When I graduated from Birkbeck, I stayed on in Manchester for a year and carried on working at the theatre in a freelance capacity. When the original director



Photo by Marc Brenner.

of *Hobson's Choice* had to withdraw due to personal reasons, they asked me whether I wanted to direct it.

It was a real baptism of fire but a wonderful project to work on. It was wild to have your first main stage show at 25. I wouldn't have been able to do it if I wasn't well-integrated into the theatre thanks to Birkbeck.

I was given the award six months before Covid hit. It meant that I had that recognition in the industry, so my career was (to some extent) safeguarded from the pandemic.

How did you manage to work during Covid when theatres closed?

I was offered a show called *Harm* at the Bush Theatre. When the show got cancelled as a result of another Covid wave, we made it into a film for the BBC. It ended up being seen by over 85,000 people. When we eventually managed to stage the production in 2021, it was one of the first plays to open in London post-pandemic.

It took quite a lot of resilience during Covid, because there was such despair for theatres. Nobody knew if they were going to open again. When the theatres shut, it felt like the apocalypse. Aside from *Harm*, I managed to make the best out of Covid by teaching at drama schools,

working on digital theatre projects and doing some more general advocacy for the industry.

What is the favourite show you have directed?

One of my favourite bits of directing I am proudest of was *SHED: EXPLODED VIEW*, also at the Royal Exchange Theatre. It's a new play about domestic violence and an extremely powerful piece of writing. With difficult subject matter, it's important to create an open, honest and supportive space in the rehearsal room, as the actors have to relive it night after night. I am proud of how we handled that.

You have recently finished a production of John Osborne's 1956 play *Look Back in Anger*. Why did that play appeal to you?

It was radical in the 50s – a gritty drama filled with social realism the likes of which audiences at the time hadn't seen before. It was really shocking, and it is still shocking, because Jimmy is so abusive to his wife. I am drawn to plays that are quite extreme, because I think theatre is a helpful tool when it comes to exploring the extremities in how human beings operate with one another.

It was important to me to represent this play honestly. One of the jobs of theatre is to be empathetic to the darkest elements of human behaviour and to examine them, so that we might be able to break patterns of behaviour in the future.

I will always be drawn to things like that, which resonate with what is going on in the world.

Why do you have such a passion for theatre directing?

You have to work with other people, drawing on the energies, hearts and minds of those around you. As a director, you are the spearhead but you have to work with people to achieve that in a collaborative, empathetic way. That's really powerful and beautiful.

I love the experience in front of an audience when they are hearing a story for the first time. There's electricity. It's an amazing feeling to hear people gasp, or cry or laugh. It never gets old.

What's next for you?

One of my ultimate ambitions is to be an artistic director and run a theatre. When you run a theatre, you are fulfilling a civic duty, presenting an offer to the theatre's local community. This is not just in the shows put on stage, but also in the participation programmes, for example, or even just by the offer of a space in the bar to hang out and have a cup of tea.

Our programmes in theatre and performance include:

- BA Theatre and Performance
- BA Theatre and Arts Management
- BA Theatre and Creative Writing
- BA Theatre and English
- BA Theatre, Film and Media
- MA Dramaturgy
- MA Text and Performance
- MFA Theatre Directing

Volunteer at Birkbeck

MENTORING PATHWAYS

Mentoring Pathways connects final-year students with alumni and members of Birkbeck's supporter organisations to receive mentoring on their next career steps. "Volunteering with Mentoring Pathways taught me to be empathetic and brave. My mentees shared their concerns and dreams with me, and I gained the courage to believe in their potential and motivate them through our journey."

Maryam Sarim, Careers Planner, Shaw Trust
Graduated from Birkbeck with an MSc in Career Management and Counselling, 2010



CAREERS CLINICS

Through the Careers Clinics programme, volunteers help students achieve their career goals by providing personalised CV guidance and industry insight. "Careers Clinics are a two-way process. In an informal setting, volunteers can pass on advice and experience while gaining an understanding of the student's individual qualities and aspirations. This exchange of ideas and new perspectives is one of the elements that make Birkbeck such a special place."

Warren Shore, Freelance Journalist
Graduated from Birkbeck with an MA in Contemporary Literature and Culture, 2019



GLOBAL BUDDIES

Global Buddies connects new international students with alumni volunteers to help them settle into Birkbeck and life in London. "It was a pleasure to connect with my assigned students on Global Buddies, who were enthusiastic to make the most of their opportunities in London. I hope they also enjoyed the connection and found the tips useful."

Ann Means, Advisor and Researcher, EdPower-U
Graduated from Birkbeck with an MSc and PhD in Organisational Behaviour, 2006 and 2012



Birkbeck is proudly committed to its transformative mission to support students from all walks of life to successfully start and complete their studies.

And it's thanks to Birkbeck's alumni and corporate volunteers that we can support final-year students to navigate the steps to their future careers and professional development goals in the Mentoring Pathways programme.

For the second year, we recognised the progress, achievements and dedication of both students and alumni taking part in the programme with a Mentoring Pathways Awards celebration.

Professor Joanne Leal, Pro Vice Chancellor - Academic Projects, who presented the awards, said: "In the Higher Education context, mentorship is particularly valuable as a way of introducing students to new personal and professional networks, to improve their knowledge, their skills and help grow their social and cultural capital."

Alin Stanica (BSc Business, 2024) was kindly nominated by his mentor Olivia Hui (MSc Management, 2022) and received the Mentee of the Year award in recognition of his development on the programme. He paid tribute to Olivia for giving him the tools to reach for his career goals.

He said: "My mentor helped me put into words my ideas and what I was thinking, because when you don't have that experience you don't know. "With her help, I might be able to get a job in a couple of months, which is awesome."

Olivia added: "I was really lucky to be matched with someone who was very enthusiastic and self-directed. We got to know each other and each other's backgrounds.

"What I found really interesting about Alin was that he had come from an entirely different background. He'd been in hospitality for 15 years.

"Alin's commitment has been truly inspiring. From the very first meeting, his eagerness to learn and proactive approach to every task demonstrated a dedication to personal and professional growth."

Mentoring benefits Birkbeck students, but also offers mentors the unique opportunity to improve their professional skills and connect with our volunteering community.

Amanda Pinto KC, who won the Mentor of the Year award, said: "I want to encourage people to make the most of their skills and experience by sharing what I can to help them to make the best of what they have.

"The highlight of my mentoring experience is when you see your mentees get through everything from their own efforts but with a bit of help and discussion from me."

Scan to find out more about how you could help Birkbeck's unique community.



CHAMPIONING BETTER SUPPORT FOR MENOPAUSAL WOMEN



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Becky Cotton (MRes Government, Policy and Politics, 2008) has spent her career advocating for better access to mental health support. After co-founding her own company, Lumino, she is in a position to develop unique support for women's health problems, specifically symptoms of menopause, to be accessed more widely.
.....

For Becky Cotton, advocating for and securing change for people's mental health has always been her motivation.

Having worked in mental health policy for the NHS Confederation, she was instrumental in securing major policy commitments throughout different Governments as well as increasing mental health funding.

She said: "Mental health has always been my passion and the thing that has really driven me. We live in one of the richest countries in the world and we are already increasingly grateful for the NHS that is there for us when we are unwell. But it's still the case that at any one time, one in five people are experiencing a mental health crisis.

"Too few people are experiencing treatment for that. It has improved but it's nowhere near where we need it to be. Given that's my motivation to see these numbers shift, policy was a good way of advocating for and securing change."

She credits her time at Birkbeck for helping her drive forward her career in public policy.

She said: "I knew a Masters was going to help in my career. Birkbeck allows people to undertake that level of study while working. I was never

going to be able to fit a degree around a full-time job at another university and if I did, I couldn't live in London. I am really glad I did it."

Driven by her desire to run her own company and with the Brexit referendum taking place in 2016, Becky decided it was the right time for her to move on after more than a decade at the NHS Confederation. She then embarked on a Master's in Business Management, thanks to a scholarship from the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trust.

She said: "It introduced me to entrepreneurship. I got to know people who were running their own companies. That was an idea in the back of my head as another vehicle of driving change."

In 2018, Becky was awarded a Churchill Fellowship to explore how digital technology is being used to improve mental health in Australia and the USA.

She said: "I have always been interested in digital therapeutics. There's a fundamental challenge in mental health services in that the treatment is provided by people and so it's important to have that relationship. But the model we have for delivering treatment and care is so dependent on people, it makes it difficult to scale up access unless you have vast numbers.

"It's increasingly difficult to see that happening in an environment where funding is flat. The question is: how we might use digital therapeutics to upscale access? How could we turn some elements of somebody's treatment digital to access in a self-guided way? It's not about removing people from that process. It's about using those psychologists and mental health professionals more efficiently."

To help tackle these challenges and offer scalable and sustainable mental healthcare through digital therapeutic programmes, Becky co-founded start-up Lumino with senior strategist and technologist Mo Morgan in 2020.

In this new sector, with products launching to help people living with insomnia and diabetes, it was Becky

and Mo's vision to specifically tackle women's health challenges.

Lumino's first product, Seren, is currently in development and provides self-guided cognitive behavioural therapy for anyone dealing with menopause symptoms.

Personalised programmes, all on an app, help people deal with concerns from hot flushes to night sweats and sleep problems to stress.

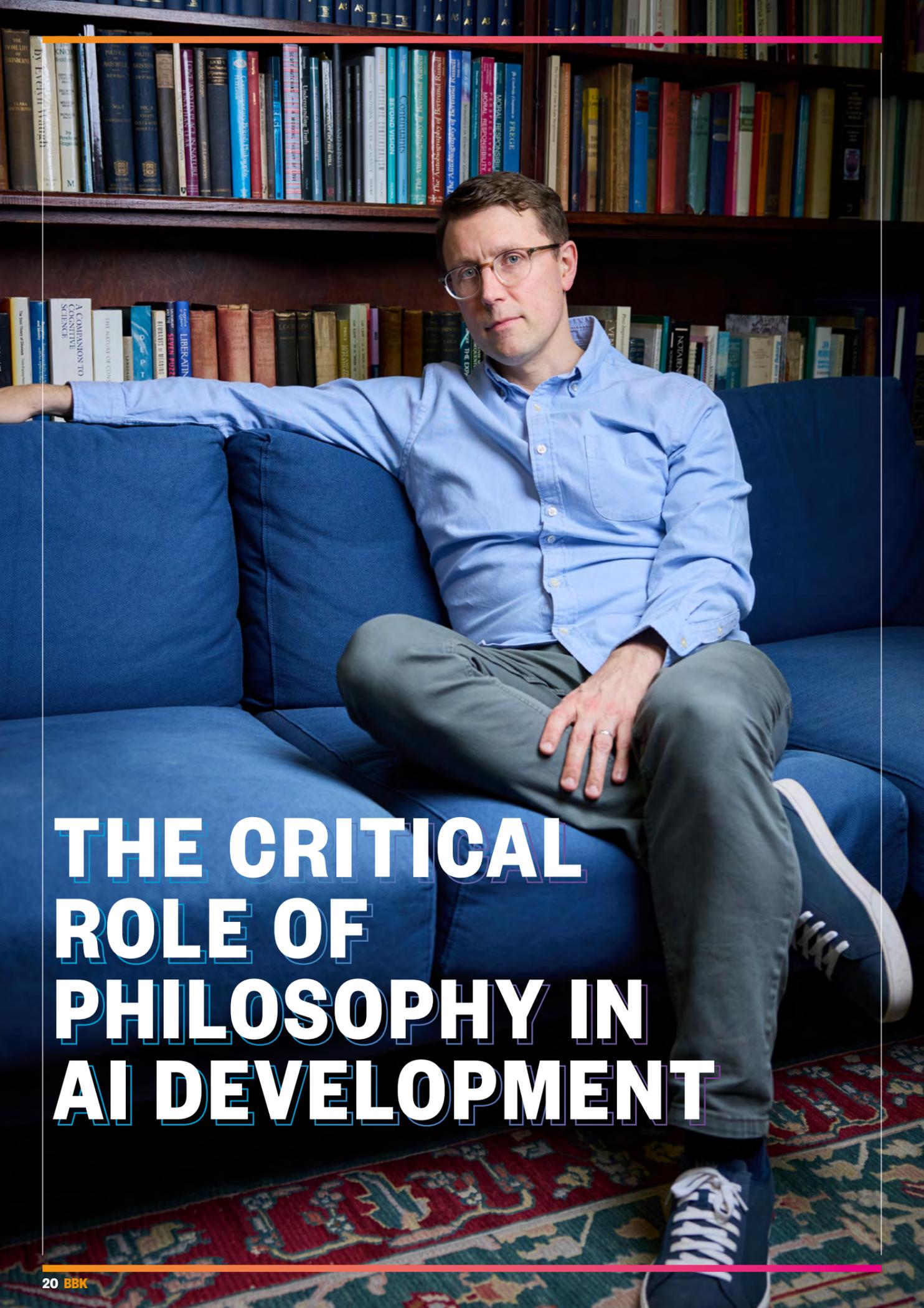
Becky said: "Treatment for menopause is very underserved. It's often the case that people's experiences of going through the menopause can be very difficult. HRT can be incredibly helpful for an awful lot of people but there is a good evidence base for other sorts of treatments around the same time. Psychological therapies can be very helpful either for somebody who is taking HRT and still experiencing symptoms or for those people who can't take HRT.

"Women over 50 in this country are the fastest growing demographic in the workforce. There's a huge number of women who currently are not getting the treatment and care that they likely need and if we can make a difference in terms of improving access to helpful treatment, that can only be a good thing.

"We want to make a difference to the lives of all those women who aren't getting the support they would otherwise benefit from"

In 2023, Becky was named as the winner of Innovate UK's Women in Innovation award, recognising trailblazing women entrepreneurs, which gave her a "huge vote of confidence in a challenging world".

Giving her advice to budding entrepreneurs, she said: "You don't have to leave your job to dip your toe in the water. Just start. Don't be shy about finding the communities of people who are on the same journey. Community really matters."



THE CRITICAL ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN AI DEVELOPMENT

“It’s about understanding AI not just as a tool, but as something that may one day challenge our very understanding of what it means to be human”

As the world grapples with the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence (AI), higher education institutions have a crucial role to play in shaping how society responds to the ethical, philosophical and social questions that arise. At the forefront of this effort is Dr Alex Grzankowski, reader in philosophy and course leader for Birkbeck’s new Master’s programme, AI, Ethics and Society.

Dr Grzankowski acknowledges that AI represents both an opportunity and challenges for humanity: “A lot of AI discourse has been driven by engineers and technologists,” he explains, “but the philosophical and ethical dimensions have often been sidelined. The AI, Ethics and Society course seeks to address this by offering students the tools to think critically about AI’s role in society, whether it’s in our workplaces, our healthcare systems or our everyday lives.” For him, understanding the mechanics of AI is only one aspect of a much larger issue that requires deep reflection on the technology’s potential to shape society: “It’s about understanding AI not just as a tool, but as something that may one day challenge our very understanding of what it means to be human,” he notes.

As part of this broader initiative, Dr Grzankowski has also been a key organiser behind Birkbeck’s Critical AI Seminar Series, a public-facing platform designed to engage people from all walks of life in discussions about the potential challenges and triumphs posed by AI. By opening the discussion to the public, as well

as Birkbeck staff and students, Dr Grzankowski and his colleagues see the seminar series as a vital means of bridging the gap between the academic world and the broader public. “One of the main goals of the seminars is to create a space where we can interrogate AI from a variety of perspectives,” he explains. “We bring in speakers from computer science, philosophy, law and the social sciences to explore questions about AI’s impact on society, on governance, on our daily lives. “The series encourages attendees to think critically about how AI will shape the future and how society might respond to its development.

Dr Grzankowski’s areas of philosophical study have often focused on concepts like language, mind and thinking and AI lends itself well to these explorations. “Is AI a tool – something we control and use for specific tasks – or is it an agent in its own right, with agency and ethical considerations of its own?” he asks. This distinction, according to Dr Grzankowski, is crucial for determining how we, as a society, will interact with and regulate AI systems.

One example Dr Grzankowski cites is the development of AI-driven robots, which could one day perform tasks ranging from household chores to military operations. “What are we building and how are we building it?” he asks. “Do we really want to create something that can feel pain or resentment or fear? Or do we want to skip that altogether and just create a mindless tool that just does the task?” On the other hand, he acknowledges that there may be situations – such as in healthcare or therapy – where creating AI agents capable of genuine feeling and empathy may be very useful. “Which path are we going to follow? Maybe we want to go down both paths, but it needs consideration from a philosophy of mind perspective as well as an engineering one.”

Dr Grzankowski is also the founder of the London AI and Humanity Project at the University of London. The initiative aims to ensure AI development is guided as much by philosophy and psychology as it is by technology. The project fosters dialogue between academia and

industry, holding meetings with companies like Google to explore how philosophical insights can shape AI. A cornerstone of the project is the creation of a glossary of philosophical AI terms to help developers think critically about the concepts that underpin their work.

The future of work is another area of focus for Dr Grzankowski, who stresses the need for policy makers to ensure cohesive, rather than disruptive, AI-driven innovation. “The question isn’t just which jobs will be lost, but how we can ensure that AI creates opportunities rather than exacerbates inequalities,” he explains. “As jobs shift and change, how will people train and retrain to ensure livelihoods and communities aren’t damaged?”

Environmental considerations are another critical concern. “The energy consumption of AI systems is staggering,” he notes. “Training large language models or running vast neural networks requires enormous computational power and this has significant environmental costs.” For Dr Grzankowski, finding a balance between technological progress and environmental responsibility is not just a technical problem but a philosophical one.

“My hope is that graduates will become leaders who champion ethical AI development”

The MA AI, Ethics and Society course is designed for a diverse audience, from recent graduates to mid-career professionals, and addresses many of these topics. He hopes the course will appeal to people working in policy, law, tech and healthcare. “My hope is that graduates will become leaders who champion ethical AI development,” he comments. “Whether they go into policymaking, corporate governance or education, I want them to carry forward a commitment to thinking critically about AI and advocating for its responsible use.”

Leaving a legacy that lasts



"I very much enjoyed my three years at Birkbeck. It was not only a great place to study, but also a place where I have made some amazing friends."

Rick also credits his studies at Birkbeck for his success in his future career, particularly with securing a thought leadership role at the Institute of Chartered Accountants. He said: "My academic background from Birkbeck helped me get the job, as well as providing the skills to do the job."

Rick also spent time mentoring final-year Birkbeck students, helping them navigate their way to finishing their studies and into their future careers. Driven by the transformative impact of his experience, and his desire to share this with future generations, Rick decided to pledge a generous gift to the University in his will.

He said: "I wanted to be able to support future generations, but also to make sure there is investment in Birkbeck's infrastructure and processes."

Gifts like this allow us to forge ahead at the cutting edge of education, opening doors to students of all ages and backgrounds and nurturing them within our unique model of teaching.

"It was important to me to support those who otherwise wouldn't have been able to access Higher Education," says Rick Payne (MSc Occupational Behaviour, 2008), who is leaving a legacy to Birkbeck in his will and has been supporting our students for 18 years.

He added: "I started donating very soon after I left as Birkbeck had been good for me. I have always been a believer in lifelong learning and Birkbeck has always hit the mark in delivering that."

Rick chose to study at Birkbeck after taking voluntary redundancy from his career in finance, deciding instead to pursue his interest in psychology.

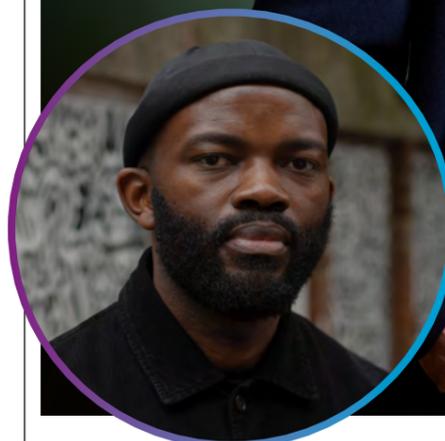
"I looked at studying a Master's and Birkbeck was up there as a leader in its field in Occupational Behaviour and the attraction of evening study was another big draw," he said.

Your legacy at Birkbeck

Leaving a gift in your will to Birkbeck is an incredibly meaningful and personal gesture and will give our students a chance to thrive at university and beyond.

For more information about leaving a gift in your will, email Becks White, Regular Giving Officer at Birkbeck, on rebecca.white@bbk.ac.uk.

NURTURING ARTS AND CULTURE AT BIRKBECK AND BEYOND



Professor Fintan Walsh, Head of the School of Creative Arts, Culture and Communication at Birkbeck. Inset, MA Creative Writing alumnus JJ Bola

"Art is a way to really impact the world," says MA Creative Writing alumnus and author JJ Bola.

JJ graduated from Birkbeck in 2017 after receiving a scholarship to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds to recognise their true potential. He arrived in the UK as a refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo and didn't understand English.

Now a successful writer, poet and advocate for refugees, JJ showcases how storytelling and studying arts can have real impact on society. His creative works draw on his own lived experiences of seeing racial and social inequalities in action.

He says: "Through storytelling, we learn and unlearn about the world and about each other."

"Institutions like Birkbeck that provide access to education are essential for unlocking the next great innovation in someone's mind and

ultimately, that creates value, which can be reinvested into society."

The socioeconomic benefits of engaging with arts and culture is why Birkbeck is committed to nurturing the subjects within the university and beyond in a new six-year plan. Professor Fintan Walsh, Head of the School of Creative Arts, Culture and Communication at Birkbeck, who led in the creation of the strategy, said promoting the benefits of studying these subjects is key, as "arts and cultural engagement is extremely important for wellbeing, quality of life and productivity".

The industry is also a major employer, with arts and humanities graduates driving tourism and providing a huge contribution to the UK economy.

Fintan added: "A rich arts and cultural environment forms the bedrock of any thriving community, society and institution, and universities are no different. The contribution to the UK economy is well documented, with

the last government reporting how the creative industries generated £108 billion a year, while employing over 2.3 million people across the country."

The first arts and culture strategy of its kind at Birkbeck, which runs until 2030, sets out a commitment to widen access and participation in these subject areas.

Fintan said: "Birkbeck enjoys a national and global reputation for its arts and culture research, teaching, public engagement and advocacy, and our first strategy celebrates this tradition while capturing our future commitments."

Access to arts and humanities education is increasingly challenging for many, in particular those from underrepresented and less advantaged backgrounds.

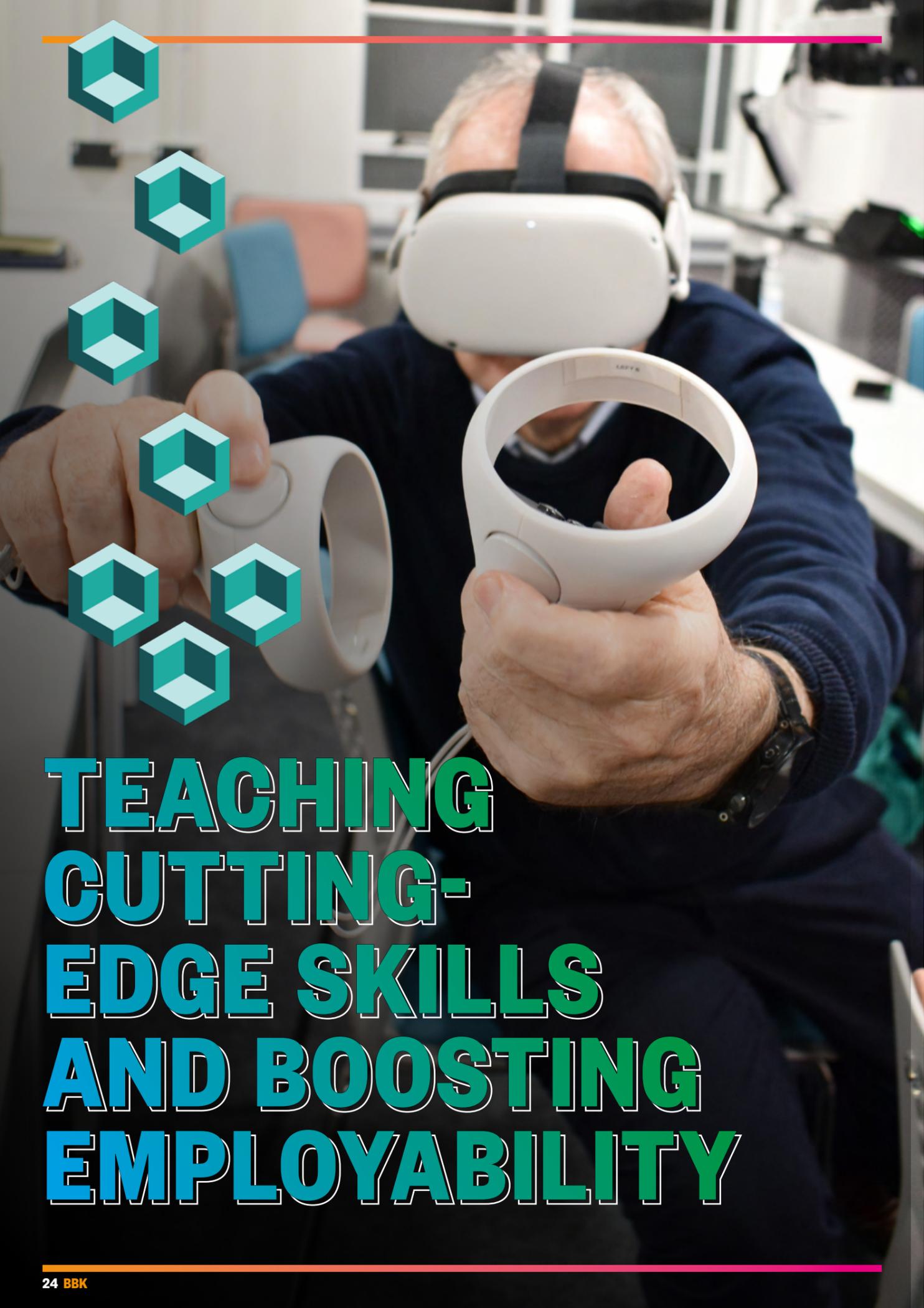
Widening access to education is a central feature of Birkbeck's mission, and our Arts and Culture Strategy is a timely statement that this includes access to arts and humanities education for all."

Birkbeck runs a vibrant programme of events and activity throughout the year to celebrate the research, industry collaborations and teaching across literature, theatre, creative writing, film, media and visual culture. Arts Week is a flagship event.

The strategy also captures the commitment to prepare students for the workplace. Fintan added: "We ensure that all our students have opportunities to pursue a range of modules and training to enhance pathways to employability, which may include work-oriented modules, industry placements and professional skills-based modules."

Welcoming back a supportive network of alumni for guest lectures and workshops "lets students know what's possible once they've left", says Fintan.

Read Birkbeck's full Arts and Culture Strategy [here](https://www.bbk.ac.uk/school/creative-arts-culture-and-communication/arts-culture-strategy): <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/school/creative-arts-culture-and-communication/arts-culture-strategy>



TEACHING CUTTING- EDGE SKILLS AND BOOSTING EMPLOYABILITY

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A virtual reality suite, in Birkbeck's main library, will prepare students for today's fast-evolving job market.

Opening in October 2025, the new state-of-the-art facility will provide staff and students with access to cutting-edge technology, such as virtual reality (VR), advanced 3D scanners and Motion Capture (MoCap) suits.

The Immersive Learning Centre (ILC) aims to equip students with transferrable skills that will set them apart in the workplace, offering facilities for both the consumption and creation of immersive content.

The ILC includes four key spaces: an immersive learning classroom, a PC lab, a studio and a loan facility. These spaces enable students and staff to engage with and create immersive learning experiences that support teaching. They also allow them to gain practical experience in applying emerging technologies across diverse sectors.

The development is supported by a larger multimillion-pound grant from the Office for Students, which also funded Birkbeck's 'HyFlex' classrooms – technology that synchronises inperson and online learning.

The four main facilities in the ILC are:

- **Immersive Learning Classroom:** 20 VR workstations with tethered and untethered headsets for dynamic, collaborative experiences that help students deepen their understanding of complex concepts.
- **Immersive Learning PC Lab:** Equipped with 20 high-performance PCs, this collaborative workspace facilitates a creative workflow for creating of immersive environments and conventional editing capabilities.
- **Immersive Learning Studio:** This space will be used by staff and students to work with 3D scanners, 360 microphones, photogrammetry equipment and MoCap suits. They can create digital assets that can be turned into immersive experiences or conventional media.

• **Immersive Learning Loan Facility:**

Staff and students will be able to borrow VR headsets, 360 cameras and other production equipment to explore virtual and augmented reality independently. Staff will be able to develop their own immersive learning content and students will be able to use the production equipment to complete diversified forms of assessment.

A pilot programme throughout the 2024-25 academic year is empowering academic staff to experiment with integrating immersive learning into their teaching.

James Cull, Digital Educational Consultant at Birkbeck and Deputy Project Lead, said: "The Immersive Learning Centre's technology has the potential to transform education in nearly every subject, offering new ways to foster valuable skills that will help Birkbeck graduates stand out in a competitive, digitally integrated job market.

For example, in the Immersive Learning Classroom, a geology student could use a VR headset to 'pick up' and examine fossils in a detailed, large-scale, real-world environment.

This will enable students to interact with content and deepen their understanding in a way that wouldn't be possible in the real world."

James also spoke about the opportunities for alumni to connect their organisations with the centre, offering students the chance to work on real-world projects.

He said: "We are eager to talk to external partners in the public and private sectors, creating collaborative experiences that benefit both students and employers.

For example, augmented reality virtual tours could be developed for museums and heritage sites or we could collaborate with construction companies to create detailed site scans for planning and design purposes."

"The technology has the potential to transform education"

Silvia Posocco, Professor of Social Anthropology at Birkbeck, added: "I have had the pleasure of working with the passionate colleagues from the ILC team over the past two years.

"Together, we curated VR activities which align closely with the syllabi of two undergraduate modules, 'Power' and 'Bodies'.

"We specifically focused on showcasing Indigenous media and Indigenous Studies perspectives alongside work on aesthetically rich explorations of the embodied experience of sensory change.

"The students expressed high praise for this innovative aspect of the curriculum, and I look forward to further integrating these elements in all aspects of my teaching."

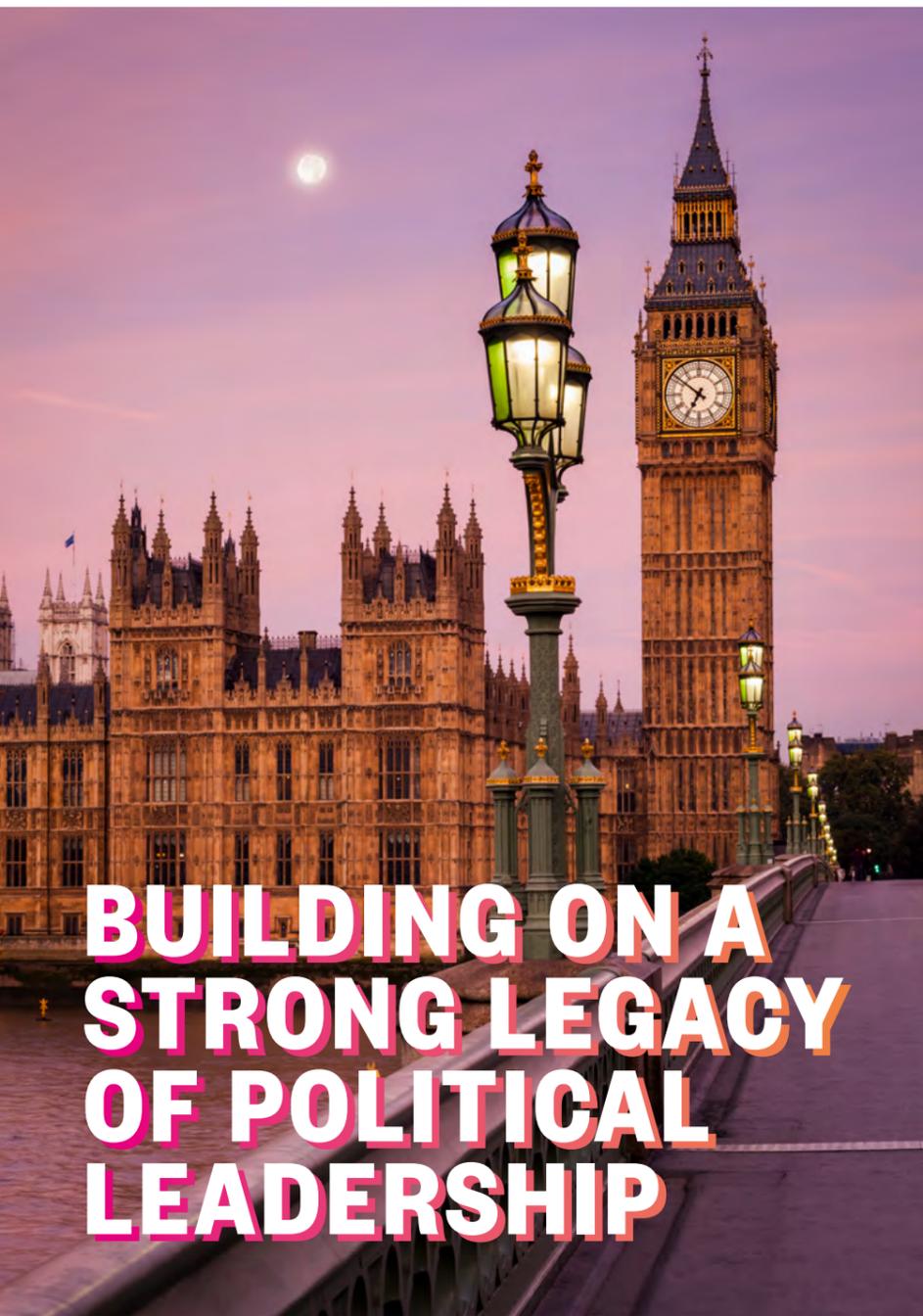
As alumni, you are invited to tour the ILC and discuss opportunities for how you and your organisations could collaborate with the Immersive Learning team by emailing Immersive-Learning@bbk.ac.uk.

A potential week of activity

- **Monday:** A palaeontologist scans a fossil, which students then explore in VR.
- **Tuesday:** BA Theatre students create an immersive radio adaptation of Chekhov using special 360 microphones.
- **Wednesday:** Digital Media students use photogrammetry

to create 'digital twins' for use in video game assessments.

- **Thursday:** A researcher uses Motion Capture to track a volunteer's reactions to a VR simulation.
- **Friday:** A teacher borrows a drone for the weekend to capture 360-degree footage for a Geology class the following week.



BUILDING ON A STRONG LEGACY OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Throughout history, the Birkbeck community can count many prominent UK politicians among its members, including former Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. Last year, its largest Parliamentary contingent to date was elected to Parliament – 14 Birkbeck alumni and fellows across the three main political parties.

Birkbeck has long been associated with fostering academic excellence and producing graduates who go on to make notable contributions to society, including many distinguished alumni and fellows who have risen to prominence in politics.

In the 2024 UK General Election, 14 Birkbeck alumni and fellows from across the political spectrum were elected to Parliament. The leaders of both the Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties are both alums. Notably, it is also one of only six UK universities that has a Prime Minister amongst its alumni. The most recent appointments of Birkbeck Fellows to Government include David Lammy MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and Lisa Nandy MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media

and Sport, and graduate of the MSc Politics and Government course, as well as a number of junior ministerial appointments.

These individuals not only reflect the diversity of Birkbeck’s student body and wider community but also demonstrate the College’s commitment to producing leaders in various fields, including politics. Birkbeck makes an indelible mark on the world and shapes policy influenced by its values around lifelong learning, academic rigour and accessibility.

Professor Matt Innes, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Corporate), says: “The College’s role in educating public servants is particularly significant. In a society where political leadership is often shaped by those with access to exclusive educational institutions, Birkbeck has offered a different kind of academic experience – one that is accessible and rooted in the practical concerns of everyday life. This has created a fertile ground for developing MPs who bring a wealth of real-world experience to their roles.

“Our vision for lifelong learning and social mobility has also fostered a natural partnership with our broader community of fellows who all extol the values of a Birkbeck education and pursue the very same ideals within their day-to-day work.”

We take a look at three Members of Parliament from the main parties, who are all members of Birkbeck’s community and make a significant impact on policy, legislation and social change.

The legacy of Birkbeck, in shaping MPs who go on to serve in the UK Government, highlights the institution’s commitment to fostering talent that is rooted in a strong sense of social responsibility.

As the political landscape continues to evolve, Birkbeck’s impact on UK politics will remain a testament to the power of accessible education in shaping the future of governance.

OUR FELLOWS AND ALUMNI



The Rt Hon Kemi Badenoch MP

Kemi Badenoch is the Leader of the Conservative Party and the Conservative MP for North West Essex. She studied Law at Birkbeck, graduating with a LLB in 2009.

She has visited Birkbeck on a number of occasions since her studies – both as a London Assembly member and later as a Member of Parliament. Her areas of interest include social mobility and integration. She has provided mentoring to women who wish to pursue careers in technology. Kemi was formerly Minister for Women and Equalities [for the Equality Hub] between October 2022 and July 2024.

She is the first Conservative leader not to be educated at Oxbridge, challenging the persistence of social elitism at the top of British politics. She has acknowledged, in a debate at the House of Commons on 20th October 2020, that “education is key to our mission as a government to level up and spread opportunity to everyone, whatever their background”.



The Rt Hon David Lammy MP

David Lammy is Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and has been the Labour Member of Parliament for his home constituency of Tottenham since 2000. He is also a former universities minister (serving as Minister for Higher Education in 2009–10) and a Birkbeck Fellow.

David has spoken of the “transformative” experience of a university education (Guardian, 17 June 2019) and insists that it is the responsibility of universities to diversify the elite.

He has been a long-time campaigner for lifelong learning and adult education, and was instrumental in establishing Birkbeck’s outreach programme in Haringey. David has also spoken on the link between education and social mobility. He has been a vocal advocate for expanding access to higher education to make it more inclusive, especially for more marginalised communities.



Baroness Garden of Frognal

Diana Garden, Baroness Garden of Frognal, is a British politician and a member of the House of Lords and the Liberal Democrats. A Birkbeck Fellow, Baroness Garden was made a life peer in 2007 and has had a long career in public service, particularly in education.

As a member of the House of Lords, Baroness Garden has participated in debates and committees on issues related to education, social justice and public policy.

She regularly makes mention of Birkbeck and lifelong learning, and is particularly active in discussions on the future of education and how to address inequality within the sector.

Baroness Garden worked for The City and Guilds of London Institute for 20 years, developing and promoting vocational qualifications. She has been active in a range of societies and charities.

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

well
adapt

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Birkbeck PhD student and disability changemaker Georgia Bondy (she/they) was named on the 2024 Shaw Trust Disability Power 100 list. Recognised for their innovation and influence in changing the perceptions of disability, Georgia was announced as one of the 100 most influential disabled individuals in the UK. By founding the social enterprise WellAdapt, she is working to support chronically ill people after spending years trying to get answers about her own symptoms.
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"It took 12 years from my first doctor's visit aged seven to get a diagnosis of my genetic condition," Georgia says. "I spent a lot of time being fobbed off by GPs and was let down by the medical system in terms of diagnosis and support."

Georgia was finally diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome and relapse remitting multiple sclerosis (MS). She has since been learning how to manage her symptoms with the aim of experiencing the joy in life that comes from disability.

They said: "I dislocate my joints a lot and that leads to chronic pain all the time. I pass out because my blood vessels are too stretchy. It very much affects my day-to-day in general and comes with chronic fatigue. The biggest thing with MS is that you never know what will happen and what bodily function you will lose one day. The fear is worse than the condition – you have no idea how much will come back."

In 2018, Georgia began sharing her experiences on social media, which led to her building a community of disabled individuals all searching for answers and support.

"At first it wasn't just a disability focus – it was about being black, queer and a woman," they said. "I started getting people reaching out personally about their disability saying thank you. I realised there was a space for talking about how we manage our day-to-day in terms of disability and handling the emotional and mental health impact.

"I had to spontaneously find that information about how to have a

fulfilling life – those little pieces of people's lived experience teaching you how to live in a way that feels manageable and enjoyable. I thought why not put all that information in one place?"

"People need someone to guide them through, as learning to be chronically ill takes a lifetime"

Georgia then founded WellAdapt, a social enterprise that supports chronically ill people to manage symptoms like pain and fatigue. The organisation began by providing online physical exercise and mental wellbeing courses to people with disabilities and chronic health conditions. But Georgia soon realised she wanted to advocate for change by partnering with healthcare providers and policymakers to build better chronic illness care systems.

They said: "When I came into this, I wanted to help communities share information but I realised how big the entire issue was. People need someone to guide them through, as learning to be chronically ill takes a lifetime. What I am hoping for in the long-term is to try to facilitate professionals within the NHS that can understand how to assist a chronically ill person and find out what they might need.

"Getting this recognition just gives me a reason to pause and realise that someone thinks I am doing something right"

"I'd like to figure out a mentorship model that can be the beginnings of this but that model needs to

have heavy connections within the healthcare system. So at the moment, I'm having conversations within the NHS and within healthcare policy. I'd like to use that to build a better healthcare system."

Speaking about their place as a finalist on the Disability Power 100 list, Georgia said: "When you are trying to build something like this, you feel like you are doing it wrong all the time because you are trying to create something that doesn't exist. You are wanting to do something that helps but there is a lot of uncertainty and fear. Getting this recognition just gives me a reason to pause and realise that someone thinks I am doing something right."

The awards are publicly nominated and judged by a panel of 25 disabled champions. National charity Shaw Trust runs the Disability Power 100 to raise the profile of disabled talent and challenge the disability employment gap head-on.

Alona De Havilland, Head of Disability Power 100, said: "We all need role models. People who are pioneers and changemakers. The Disability Power 100 celebrates disabled role models with the same determination, expertise and ambition in all sectors from architecture to construction, finance to healthcare, transport to music.

"It is a rallying cry to future generations of leaders and a call for employers and society to recognise the talents and skills of disabled people."

Speaking about her motivation for studying at Birkbeck, Georgia said: "I was at UCL for my undergrad and MSci and I knew I wanted a change. I am a very curious person, I love research and I wanted to understand the world better.

"I liked what Birkbeck offered and I knew I wanted to come back into academia. I am exploring BDSM and disability, looking at what brings people satisfaction."

GETTING TO KNOW OUR COMMUNITY

Birkbeck is proud of its vibrant community, which features diverse and talented students and alumni, staff members committed to improving the university experience, and academics at the forefront of world-leading research. Get to know this community as we ask the same three questions to an alumnus, student, academic and staff member.



Andre Schmidt

Andre Schmidt (BA (Hons) Politics, Philosophy and History, 2023) is a retired sound producer for the film and TV industry. He won two BAFTAs for his work on *Cranford* and *Wallander*. Following his career in films and TV, he came back to

education and completed a degree at Birkbeck in 2023 to gain more skills and enhance his development.

What is your favorite place on campus and why?

My favourite place would have to be Gordon Square. I spent a lot of time there with friends from my course on the benches talking philosophy.

I have lots of nice memories there. It's nice to walk back through there now. I want to be back on those benches again.

Tell us about your best moment at Birkbeck.

I discovered an incredible

closeness with my friend Sam from my course. It felt like a freedom because I could just be myself. We had an incredible amount of silliness and fun.

What does being a Birkbeck alumnus mean to you?

I am proud to call myself an alumnus of Birkbeck and it's incredible to say I have done a degree at 60. It gives me such a sense of achievement.

Birkbeck is an amazing place and I was so happy to get such support from my lecturers.



Mona Kadhum

Mona Kadhum is a Student Success Officer at Birkbeck and works on programmes to support students transitioning to university and help them succeed in their first year. These include programmes such as On Track, a two-day event with

social activities, workshops, advice sessions and academic experiences to help prepare students for life as an undergraduate at Birkbeck.

What is your favourite place on campus and why?

The cinema. We used it as a location in the scavenger hunt as part of the On Track programme and it's amazing. It's a hidden gem at Gordon Square that people often don't realise is part of Birkbeck.

Tell us about your best moment at Birkbeck.

The first time I ran the On Track programme, at end of it we held a celebration event. It was nice to see students so excited to

start at Birkbeck, it was a great atmosphere and everyone was buzzing. It was such a positive atmosphere and great to have students, success team members and other staff teams in one place.

What does being a member of Birkbeck staff mean to you?

Birkbeck is very unique compared to other universities and you really feel it when speaking to students, especially when it's a second chance or an opportunity to change their life. Working here is special because you're supporting people to transform their lives, and you feel the passion of students compared to other institutions.



Fintan Walsh

Professor Fintan Walsh is Head of the School of Creative Arts, Culture and Communication at Birkbeck and Professor of Performing Arts and Humanities. He is the founding Director of Birkbeck Creative Practice Lab and Co-Director of Birkbeck Centre for Contemporary Theatre. He recently led in the

creation of Birkbeck's first Arts and Culture Strategy, which captures the university's commitments and ambitions in supporting, growing and promoting arts and culture in the university, and their social, civic and economic benefits. Read more about the strategy on page 23.

Where is your favourite place on campus and why?

Bloomsbury is a beautiful and inspiring environment to work in, including for its rich literary and cultural history, and proximity to London's cultural institutions. I also enjoy walking through Gordon Square, which changes dramatically with the shifting seasons.

Tell us about your best moment at Birkbeck.

My time at Birkbeck has been

full of memorable moments, but meeting students at graduation or when they visit afterwards with updates is always a highlight, especially when I am aware of challenges they faced and how they met them to achieve success.

What does being a Birkbeck academic mean to you?

It means being committed to the twin priorities of research excellence and educational opportunity for all. This remains Birkbeck's most unique and radical ambition of which I am proud to be a part of; I can't think of a better cause to invest in.

All education changes lives, but a Birkbeck education changes lives in a very specific and special way.



Viji Pirani

Viji Pirani is a third-year BSc Accounting with Finance student and is the Welfare Sabbatical Officer at Birkbeck Student Union. Since joining Birkbeck, she has also served as a Course Representative for the Business and Management Department as well as an Academic Representative for the School of Business and Law. She was born in India, raised in Mexico and spent a short time in Canada before settling down in London more than two years ago.

What is your favorite place on campus and why?

My favourite place on campus would have to be between The George Bar and or soon-to-be Social Space on the Ground floor at Birkbeck Central. They're always filled with people rich in culture, stories and experiences. It's always fun to see people on campus, especially when they're your friends and peers. Plus, I may or may not love a good pool competition every once in a while, even though I'm not very good.

Tell us about your best moment at Birkbeck.

As someone lucky enough to put on multiple 'hats' at Birkbeck, I've had many experiences to love both as a student, friend, staff member and volunteer. Some of my favourites would involve getting to speak at the Graduations for the class of 2024 this past December, as well as being elected Welfare Sabbatical Officer. But on a less

serious but more personal note, one of my favourite moments would have to be returning to campus each year to see my friends, learn about their holidays and seeing how they're grown and become such amazing individuals.

What does being a Birkbeck student mean to you?

Being a Birkbeck student, to me, means learning to accept failure and see it as a reference point towards your success. It means learning to adapt to everchanging environments and to become confident in yourself, and in the conviction you hold the world. Birkbeck is so full of people rich in experience, personality and opinion that you will always find yourself surrounded by people who inspire and amaze you. And that's what you become, one of those people with chapters of stories to tell and chapters of stories yet to be written.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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It is thanks to an incredible community effort that we can remove the financial barriers for our diverse and talented students, helping them to make a success of their university experience. This would not be possible without our community's exceptional and unwavering support.

Our campaign to support our students doesn't stop here as we continue to ramp up fundraising to meet their needs. We are committed to improving access and removing hardship to ensure students from all walks of life can achieve their goals.

.....

Donations from alumni, supporters and friends totalling more than £100,000 means that more Birkbeck students than ever before will benefit from financial support to reach their true potential.

During the autumn telephone fundraising campaign, run by the university's Development and Alumni team, 15 student and graduate callers

shared their experiences with alumni and encouraged them to give to the Birkbeck Fund.

Thanks to their efforts and the generosity of alumni and supporters, £88,000 was raised to ensure that students from all walks of life can successfully start and complete their studies.

Further donations from Birkbeck's governors meant that the total exceeded an incredible £100,000 – a figure that will transform the lives of ambitious students of all ages, professions, backgrounds and cultures.

Sir Andrew Cahn, Chair of Governors of Birkbeck, said: "My fellow governors and I are proud to join Birkbeck's alumni and supporters in donating to the telephone fundraising campaign.

"Raising over £100,000 is testament to how much this community cares about Birkbeck and how our valued

alumni want to pass on that special university experience they had to the next generation.

"I am in the privileged position of being able to witness first-hand how much this support will mean to our students, who will no longer have to be worried about their financial security.

"This truly astounding support given back by alumni and friends makes Birkbeck the special place it is." Telephone fundraiser Patrick Chimimba, who is studying MSc Sport Management and the Business of Football, chose to take part because he himself had received financial support and wanted to give back.

He said: "Coming to Birkbeck on a Chevening Scholarship, I realised that the university subsidised part of my tuition fee. Being a telephone fundraiser provided me with an opportunity to help pool resources for Birkbeck.



"Most of the alumni spoke highly about the flexibility of the evening classes against their daily personal commitments. The main reason is that people appreciate the second chance that Birkbeck provided them.

"Going back to school later in one's life is not an easy decision to make but Birkbeck has provided most people a chance."

Abbie Carr, Birkbeck's Director of Development and Alumni, said: "I'd like to thank our alumni community, our Board and our friends for giving back to Birkbeck during our autumn telephone campaign.

"The investment that alumni make in the university directly supports our students and their experience during their time at Birkbeck.

"We know that so many of our students, coming from diverse backgrounds and often navigating other commitments, need that support to access, continue and complete their studies.

"This is why we continue to reach out to make a difference, and we look forward to connecting with our alumni community in our upcoming spring telephone campaign.

"Your commitment to our transformative mission fuels the work we do. Thank you for being part of our incredible community."

Scan to find out more about supporting Birkbeck's students and how to make a gift today



INVESTING IN THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT BIRKBECK

The recent development of two brand-new student lounges at Birkbeck's main campus provides flexible multi-purpose spaces for students to meet and collaborate.

The launch of a new student lounge, at Birkbeck Central, now offers the College's largest student space outside of the library. It follows the completion in January of another new student lounge in Birkbeck's main building. Both projects are in response to a consultation with students, made possible by £2.5million in capital funding.

The new facilities are designed to enhance the campus experience for Birkbeck's entire community, part of an ongoing programme of work to provide state-of-the-art student and teaching spaces on campus. The facility, on the ground floor of Birkbeck Central, creates an expansion to the ground floor and brings currently unusable space into use.

Dan Xuereb, Director of Estates and Facilities, said: "We are really pleased at the outcomes of our current projects which are ultimately for the benefit of students and recognises that both our current and future students need to work, collaborate and interact in new ways. The most recent refurbishment, to our existing student centre at the entrance to our main Torrington Square building, was completed with a similar set of objectives."

The new lounges will serve as a central hub for students, whether they're seeking information about student services, wish to catch up on some work before class or are simply looking for a comfortable place to socialise with friends. They are open throughout the day and evening.

The project also includes an additional spend of £3.6million on 14 fully equipped HyFlex teaching rooms (supporting a blend of in-person and online teaching), which opened mid-February, as well as secondary student social facilities on the fourth floor and a small section featuring facilities for warming up food.

The new spaces deliver on the College's commitment to providing sector-leading facilities at Birkbeck.



Birkbeck offers graduates a discount on future courses

Birkbeck is incredibly proud to be furthering its commitment to supporting students and alumni through a Lifelong Learning Guarantee, which offers a discount to graduates enrolling on new courses.

Whether you are looking to reskill, retrain or learn something new, the Lifelong Learning Guarantee is our commitment to you that Birkbeck will continue to be open to you wherever you are in your learning journey.

All Birkbeck alumni who have successfully completed any award with us will receive a percentage discount on the tuition fee cost of further study with us, at all academic levels and including short courses and Continuing Professional Development.

The Lifelong Learning Guarantee percentage discount varies according to the course, with discounts ranging from 10% to 20%.

Alumni can apply and enrol for a course in the standard way, with the Lifelong Learning Guarantee discount being applied automatically at the payment stage of the enrolment process.

Professor Sally Wheeler, Vice-Chancellor of Birkbeck, explains: "Lifelong learning is in our DNA and the Birkbeck Lifelong Learning Guarantee will give real, practical support to students and alumni.

"The changing nature of the workforce and economy means that lifelong learning matters more than ever before. Our Lifelong Learning Guarantee will be ideally placed to take up the opportunities offered by the Government's Lifelong Loan Entitlement when it comes into play from 2025.

"The Lifelong Loan Entitlement will provide individuals with a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime, making it easier for adults and young people to study more flexibly – allowing them to space out their studies, transfer credits between institutions and partake in more part-time study."

Learning is lifelong, and Birkbeck is committed to ensuring that its students and alumni always have access to the transformative power of education. Scan the QR code below to find out more.



SCAN ME

www.bbk.ac.uk/prospective/lifelong-learning



For BAFTA-winning sound producer Andre Schmidt, returning to university and completing a degree at Birkbeck was a long-held dream.

The father-of-two quit his law degree at Université libre de Bruxelles in Belgium in the 1980s and moved to London.

It was here that his career began, working as a composer and sound engineer in the music industry. His credits include working as a mix engineer for ska revival band The Specials in the 1990s.

Thanks to his industry connections, he later made the leap to film and TV, working in post-production as a dialogue editor. During his career, he has worked with the likes of Keira Knightley, Tom Hardy, Bill Nighy and Kenneth Branagh on major blockbusters including *Pride and Prejudice*, *Atonement* and *The King's Speech*.

In his role, Andre assembled, synchronised and edited the dialogue in films and television productions, often working with actors in the studio to re-record dialogue.

He said: "There is quite a skill to guiding people to recapture their performance in the studio. I worked on *Stuart: A Life Backwards* and, because of the character that Tom Hardy was playing, he had this prosthesis in his mouth and we had to redo nearly all of his dialogue. I spent nearly three weeks with Tom Hardy in the studios and we developed a very close relationship."

During his career, he was awarded two BAFTAs for best sound for TV series *Cranford* in 2008 and *Wallander* in 2010.

He said: "They were such joyful experiences. I don't think I really appreciated them at the time. It's

only later that I realised that it was quite something."

After 18 years working in the film industry, Andre decided to retire and turn his attention back to his studies that he didn't finish.

He said: "All these years later since I didn't finish my degree in Brussels, I knew I wanted to do my studies. It was something I always wanted to do. I was 59 at the time and I had this drive to complete a degree and better myself through learning.

"I knew there would be people with life experience behind them and I wanted to study with like-minded people"

"I knew I wanted to do it at Birkbeck because of its reputation and because of the classes in the evening. There was something else that Birkbeck offered that was very important to me and that was that there would be older people there. I knew there would be people with life experience behind them and I wanted to study with like-minded people. I wanted to be with people who had careers and wanted to really learn."

Following his interests, Andre chose to study a BA (Hons) in Politics, Philosophy and History, which he completed in 2023.

He said: "I loved that it was an extraordinarily diverse cohort with people from extraordinarily diverse backgrounds. I was also really happy with the amazing support I got from my tutors and the feedback they gave me, particularly about my writing. This gave me a lot of confidence."

After helping actors find their voices in TV and film, Andre's experience at Birkbeck has helped him to find his own through his writing. Now aged 66, Andre is spending time writing, playing music on his cornet and reflecting, with the aim of pursuing an MA in journalism at Birkbeck.



BRIDGING DISCIPLINES, DRIVING CHANGE

The Birkbeck Research Centre for Environment and Sustainability (BRCES) was established to foster interdisciplinary research and partnerships addressing environmental challenges. Co-directed by Dr Becky Briant, from the School of Social Sciences, and Dr Pam Yeow, from Birkbeck Business School, the centre brings together experts from across disciplines to explore innovative solutions. This Q&A with the Co-Directors highlights the centre's vision, approach and ambitions.

Can you share how the idea for BRCES came about and its primary goals?

We were working as Assistant Deans in Research (Becky) and External Engagement (Pam) in our schools and between us we became aware of a lot of excellent work in environment and sustainability across all the disciplines at Birkbeck, as well as huge amounts of interest. We created the centre to showcase the great research already happening as well as to build interdisciplinary partnerships both within Birkbeck and with external partners. Our aims include:

- encouraging the publication of high-quality environment and sustainability-related research

- catalysing interdisciplinary collaborations to create new research and secure funding to address key issues in environment and sustainability
- increasing opportunities for consultancy and continuing professional development, so colleagues can maximise impact of their research
- building a network of partners with whom we can share insights and opportunities and from whom we can source opportunities for our research and students
- seeking funding for partner-based PhD studentships, to build a cohort of engaged researchers in the field of environment and sustainability

How does this approach of interdisciplinary collaboration contribute to tackling environmental and sustainability challenges?

We believe that no single discipline can solve environmental challenges alone. Understanding scientific principles is crucial, but taking action requires us to understand society and human behaviour too – how are decisions made and implemented? How

is information communicated and miscommunicated? How do systems that we need to transform, such as energy and food, currently operate? Interdisciplinary consideration is hugely important.

What makes Birkbeck's research into environment and sustainability stand out?

Many research centres tend to focus solely on science or policy. But here, we aim to integrate perspectives from the humanities. We go beyond answering questions to critically assessing whether the questions themselves are the right ones to ask. For example, Luciana Martins' research with Kew Gardens incorporates indigenous knowledge into sustainability efforts, adding crucial cultural and historical dimensions.

What role do arts, humanities and social sciences play alongside scientific research in the centre's activities?

As an example, one colleague, Scott Rodgers, is researching the role of social media in spreading information or misinformation about low traffic neighbourhoods - which is a key sustainability action that could be harder to implement if the messaging

is misdirected. We have other colleagues - Sophia Connell, Heike Bauer, Anna Richards and Simon Pooley - researching human attitudes to animals from the classical period to the 19th century to present-day human-wildlife conflict. Exploring and understanding these perspectives can shape how we approach sustainability challenges and policy decisions.

Has the centre launched new projects since its formation?

One key success has been a Bloomsbury Colleges PhD studentship co-supervised by Heike Bauer at Birkbeck and Karen Hiestand from the Royal Veterinary College, which examines the rise of veterinary specialist care in Britain within the field of human-animal studies.

How does BRCES engage with external partners?

We are currently amplifying and supporting existing partnerships, such as Anthony Brooms' work with Wind Farm Analytics, Becky's Fellowship with engineering consultancy Jacobs and James Hammond's science diplomacy initiatives. Moving forward, we'll prioritise funding for pilot projects that involve external partners. We're also collaborating with the Environmental Humanities Research Hub at the School of Advanced Studies, University of London.

How can students and alumni get involved?

Our primary outreach platform is LinkedIn – please follow us for updates. We also have a mailing list for those interested in ongoing developments and opportunities. It's also worth attending our events to stay connected with the latest research and collaborations.

How do you see BRCES shaping future solutions?

PY: We provide a platform for collaboration between researchers and external partners. Solutions will only be viable if they come from collective expertise and shared knowledge.

BB: Our focus on external partnerships is key. We envision a network of Birkbeck academics each working with external partners and training PhD students on applied sustainability topics. These students will form a cohort of visionaries, applying rigorous research to real-world challenges.

Where do you see the centre in the next few years?

PY: I see BRCES facilitating engagement between researchers, government agencies, businesses and non-profits to address environmental and sustainability challenges from multiple angles – such as economic, technological or social.

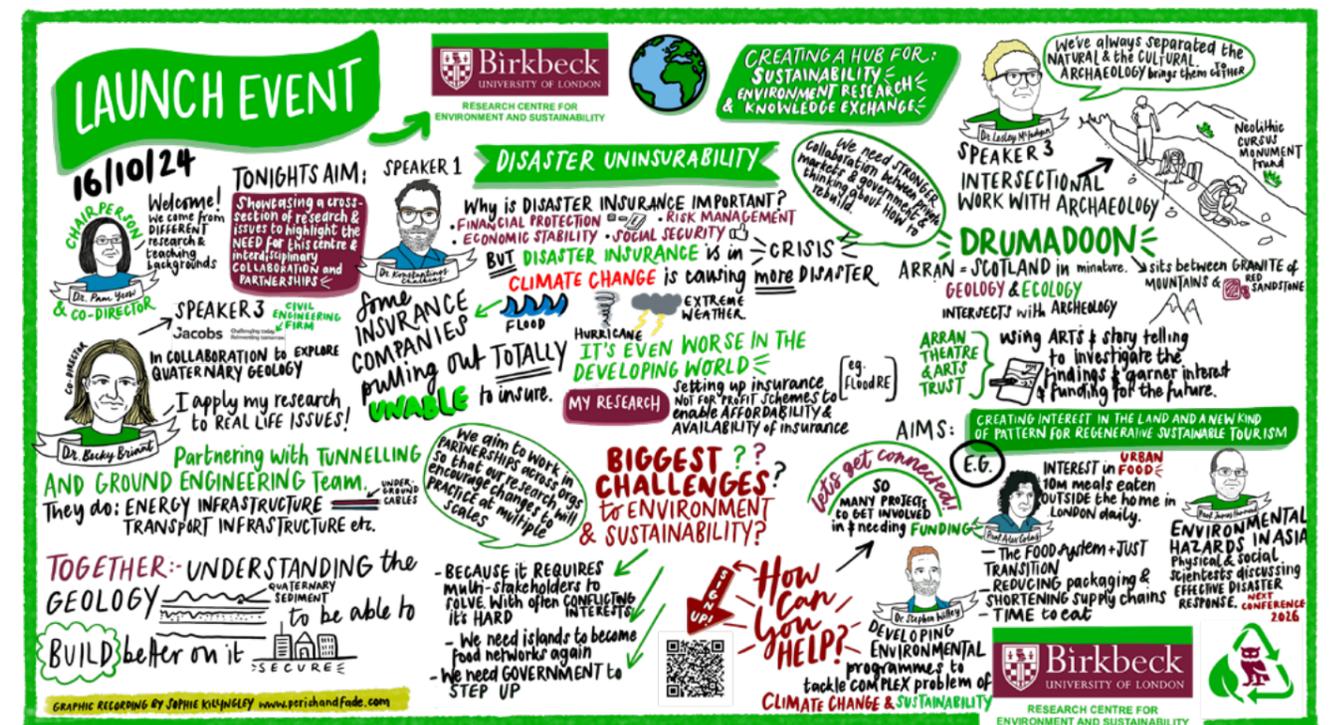
BB: I expect to see new research collaborations, external funding success and the development of our PhD training programme.

What personally inspires you about leading Birkbeck's sustainability research?

PY: Environment and sustainability research will impact most of us at least once. Whether it's to do with the quality and choice of food we consume, the location of where we live, the packaging we choose to bring our shopping home with us or even the financial investments we choose to make. As it's so prevalent, I do this because I know we will all be impacted, and therefore, we should be the ones being impactful.

BB: As a Christian, I believe the Earth that we live on and the resources we enjoy are a gift. I am committed, like Pam, to taking action in my personal life, but also through our research and teaching. The hope is that this work in environment and sustainability will also inspire and enable many more people to take action, so that we can all start to change some of the systems that currently make such individual action hard.

Our launch event graphic, below, was made by Perish and Fade from www.perishandfade.com.





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