THE IMPACT OF PHILANTHROPY AT BIRKBECK 2020/21
WELCOME

Over the past year, the #OurBirkbeck initiative has celebrated and showcased the power of our incredible community to bring about positive change. From our alumni to our students, to our academics, staff and supporters, we have seen remarkable people coming together, in true Birkbeck spirit, to create opportunities, support those in need and tackle some of the most pressing global challenges.

This year we have strengthened our commitment to creating pathways to education and ensuring all those who study with us have the tools they need to succeed. We have significantly improved our digital infrastructure, helping students transition effectively to online learning and creating the best possible learning experience to help them stay the course while navigating the pandemic.

“Without your support, many of our successes in dealing with the pandemic and offering help to our students would not have been possible.”

Professor David Latchman CBE, Vice-Chancellor

OUR PRIORITIES

George Birkbeck’s vision of creating an institution where education is available to all who want it remains central to our mission two centuries after the College was founded. Birkbeck continue to impact lives through high-quality education and research, ensuring that anyone who has the drive and ability to achieve a university education can do so, regardless of background or circumstance.

Your philanthropy supports our mission in four ways:

ENABLING ACCESS
Removing barriers to ensure education is available to all, across every level of study.

STUDENT SUPPORT
Providing the pastoral, academic, and financial support that give students the tools to succeed.

ADVANCING RESEARCH
Enabling our academics and researchers to make breakthroughs that shape our world.

INFRASTRUCTURE & ESTATES
Creating the physical and digital infrastructures that provide the best environment for students and researchers.

Over the last 12 months 1,190 alumni, friends, charitable trusts and corporate partners have given more than £3.3m to support Birkbeck.
ENABLING ACCESS

Removing barriers to postgraduate study

The strength of Birkbeck’s community lies in the different perspectives, skills and experiences each person brings to the table at all levels of study. We work to remove barriers that often prevent talented students continuing their education.

Elvira was working full-time for a local authority and volunteering with a mental health charity before enrolling on a Birkbeck master’s course in 2020. She has muscular dystrophy which means she is prone to serious physical fatigue and requires a powered wheelchair for mobility. While passionate about getting the most out of her studies to help advance her career, Elvira knew this was only possible if she reduced her work hours. The support she received from Birkbeck gave her the financial security she needed.

“The bursary has given me room to breathe and improved my mental health.”

“In the future I hope that I can mentor or provide financial assistance to a Birkbeck student, as I feel it is important to support others as I have been supported.” – Elvira, MSc Psychodynamic Counselling and Psychotherapy

Philanthropy enables us to assist those who may otherwise not have the resources to embark on graduate level study. As many people look to upskill or retrain following the pandemic, the need for this support has become even more pressing.

Creating opportunities

For each student we work with, higher education has the potential to be life-changing and not one of them should be disenfranchised from the table by their circumstance. Darren’s story demonstrates why we consider this work to be so important.

Originally from Blackpool, Darren had always struggled at school and after receiving limited support he left with few qualifications, thinking that education was just not for him. After raising a family and years of working in casinos, he was eager to make a change and made the courageous decision to revisit his education.

“When I went to interview for my place at Birkbeck, I had very little confidence in my abilities and my worth. But everyone I met was so supportive and positive. It changed my perspective on education entirely.

“The lecturers and staff at Birkbeck are amazing. I’m now even considering doing a PhD. I cannot express how much the bursary has eased the burden of studying and looking after a family. It just made me feel that someone cares. It makes me want to achieve more than I ever thought possible, and I am so grateful for the opportunities ahead.” – Darren, MA Text and Performance

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020-2021

41% of Birkbeck students come from the BAME community

78% of Birkbeck students combine work and study

We have 42 access-focused community partnerships
Help at the right time

For many students, studying at Birkbeck is an opportunity to change their circumstance. We recognise that to maximise their potential, their education must be supplemented by flexible, holistic support.

Michael* held roles as a cleaner, security officer and most recently as a construction worker, while trying to support his two children and wider family. “As the eldest of five, I sacrificed my previous opportunities for conventional education to help my family. But several years after coming to the UK, I wanted to educate myself. Birkbeck allowed me to work alongside study, so it was the perfect option.”

With few formal qualifications he embarked on his studies, but just months after starting his course, Michael was forced to consider dropping out after losing his job due to the pandemic. Being awarded support was vital in helping him pursue his goal.

“Receiving emergency hardship funding after I lost my job was a life-saver. It has helped so much to support me and my family.”

From tailored career advice to access to counselling, disability support or emergency financial funds, philanthropic support ensures that students are equipped to navigate their time at university, overcome their obstacles and thrive in their careers.

Nurturing talent

Birkbeck is committed to creating a truly inclusive environment, in which all students are supported to make the most of their university experience and take the next step in their career. To do this we provide a range of student support and careers services; including helping students and recent graduates with a declared disability, neurodivergence, or long-term health condition, who want support finding a job they will love.

“The programme really built my confidence, as I was able to meet people who had experience of having a disability and being in skilled jobs. I really enjoyed it and I feel better prepared to start my job search.” – Sarah*, BA Journalism and Media

Our bespoke support programme looks to connect participants with Disability Confident employers through skills training, workshops and funded work placements, which are made possible by philanthropic support. It was shortlisted for The Higher Education (THE) Awards for ‘Outstanding Contributions to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion’ in 2020 and not only benefits our students, but also the employers with whom we partner.

“Nicolas was the first intern we took on and he is actually still with us now, nine months later.”

“The programme is brilliant. Nicolas, the first intern we took on, is actually still with us nine months later. We look forward to partnering with Birkbeck again... it has helped the students to develop and I hope it will lead to longer-term roles for all of them.” – Hardeep Rai, CEO of the Kaleidoscope Group of Companies

*Names have been changed to protect anonymity.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020-2021

We awarded £1.55m in bursaries, scholarships & hardship awards

17% of Birkbeck students have one or more declared disabilities

95% of students are in work or further study 6 months after graduating
Solutions to modern problems

Nurturing the next generation of thinkers and creating solutions to contemporary problems has been at the core of Birkbeck’s mission for nearly 200 years. Philanthropic gifts are integral to supporting innovation and allowing our academics to pursue research that will impact the world, and our future.

Dr Stefan Engels is a lecturer in physical and environmental geography and an expert in paleoecology. His research focuses on natural archives, and he recently received seed funding to support a proof-of-concept project aimed at disentangling the driving forces behind the global decline in biodiversity. The project looks at insect diversity, which has been acutely affected by environmental changes over the past 30 years.

“Insects are keystone organisms supporting our global food production system. A decrease in insect populations and diversity presents a serious threat to the functioning of ecosystems and global food security,” says Stefan.

He aims to provide new forms of data, offering perspectives on ecosystem changes that will help determine the main drivers of the ongoing decrease in insect diversity. This funding enabled Stefan to carry out fieldwork in the lakes of the Bergen region in Norway. He hopes it is the first step to securing a larger grant that will further this research and provide critical information for effective wetland management and the conservation of freshwater biodiversity.

“I’m grateful to everyone who supports our research and encourages us to seek answers to important questions.” – Dr Stefan Engels, Physical and Environmental Geography

Supporting emerging academics

At Birkbeck we want to continue to challenge the landscape of academia and support diversity of perspective, which not only enhances our students’ learning experience but also inspires innovation in research.

In January, Nerges Azizi started a PhD in Law. Her studies are funded by a Birkbeck initiative designed to address under-representation in academia.

Nerges is passionate about supporting asylum seekers and has spent the past 18 months utilising the six languages she speaks to work as a translator, interpreter and advocate for refugees in Germany.

Her efforts inspired her to undertake a research project into the legal treatment of refugees and forced migrants around the Mediterranean border zone. Her PhD explores how the law can be applied to ensure states meet their human rights obligations.

By placing the border crossings of the Mediterranean Sea into a longer historical perspective, and conducting fieldwork with human rights organisations, Nerges aims to consider “ways in which refugees and migrants may be able to access their rights more effectively.”

“Having the financial stability of a scholarship is indispensable and vital to be able to concentrate on your researching and writing. This is particularly the case for students from working-class backgrounds and ethnic minorities, and these experiences are crucial to the diversification of the research landscape and building the confidence of young researchers.” – Nerges Azizi, PhD Law

“Th ese experiences are crucial to diversifying the research landscape and building young researchers’ confidence."

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020-2021

- We ranked in the top quartile for research and teaching
- Birkbeck is home to more than 40 research and specialist institutes
- We have 845 PhD students and academic researchers
Digital learning support

During the pandemic, the switch to virtual delivery highlighted the technology gap across our student body. Many of our students relied on Birkbeck’s onsite facilities to undertake research, write essays and submit coursework. Lacking any other IT equipment, a number of students resorted to studying on their mobile phones following the sudden move to remote learning.

To help narrow this gap and ensure students had the tools to engage effectively with their courses, Birkbeck launched a programme to cover the costs of essential resources including laptops, IT accessories and broadband services.

“Studying online was difficult for me at the beginning, particularly as I had to share a computer with my siblings who were also trying to study. The funding helped me to get a laptop, which has made a massive difference.” – Afrikana, BA Global Politics and International Relations

The resources and learning support I’ve received from Birkbeck have helped me to fit in with my classmates and feel comfortable and confident that I can achieve.” – Afrikana, BA Global Politics and International Relations

Philanthropy gave us the flexibility and agility to respond to what could have been a significant disparity for our students, and to date we have offered 273 students funding to support their digital engagement.

Although we are implementing a model of flexible in-person and virtual teaching for the coming academic year, we have committed to expanding this programme of support. We want to ensure all students have access to the proper tools and infrastructure to succeed, and this programme will help achieve that.

A new learning hub for our community

While we continue to develop our digital infrastructure and resources to adapt to a flexible way of learning, we hold true to our commitment to in-person teaching and continue to invest in state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities.

373 Euston Road was an important step towards our strategic goal of having all students taught on Birkbeck premises. Our students have told us that the space they are in matters; emphasising that it affects their productivity, creates a sense of belonging and brings our student community together, enabling them to learn from their peers as well as their lecturers.

“From my experience, having an excellent learning environment has a massive impact on productivity and motivation levels. Knowing that you have great facilities and all the resources you need makes you want to be in that environment and continue to show up. Your surroundings have a huge effect on your mood as well, so the new classroom and teaching facilities are definitely welcoming and inspire creativity.” – Adeeba, MSc Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuropsychology

Opening to students for the first time this October, 373 Euston Road will house our largest lecture theatre, new classrooms, and dedicated co-learning space where students can prepare

“Having an excellent learning environment has a massive impact on your productivity and motivation levels.”

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020-2021

40% of Birkbeck students are from households with incomes below £25k

Our student body is made up of more than 150 nationalities

Part-time students ranked us 1st in London for teaching & overall satisfaction
JOIN OUR SUPPORTER COMMUNITY TODAY

As a community, we can ensure background or circumstance never limit access to education. We can provide vital support so that every student has the tools to succeed. We can continue to build an environment that supports a diverse learning community and delivers world-class research with the power to create change.

Join us by making a gift to Birkbeck of £10 per month to help continue this vital work. Thank you for supporting Birkbeck.