



Birkbeck
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

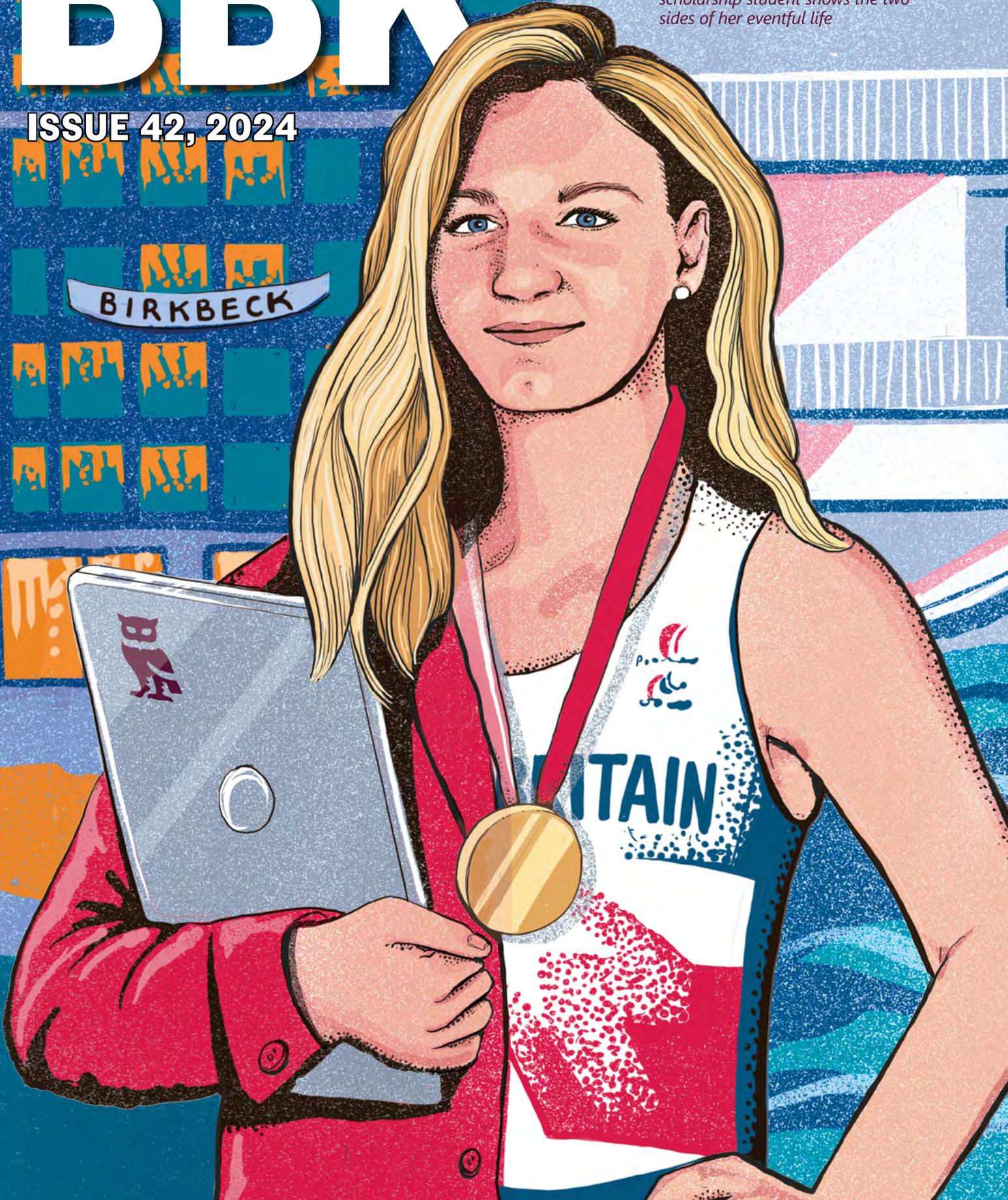
BBK

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GOING FOR GOLD

Giedrė Rakauskaitė

Paralympic gold medallist and current scholarship student shows the two sides of her eventful life



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“We must continue to place our students and the quality of their experience at the heart of everything the University does.”

Although much at Birkbeck is new to me, I am of this place. I was a Professor of Law here in the early 2000s. It was one of the most rewarding experiences of my career. I am delighted to see that it continues to attract a high calibre of staff and a uniquely diverse and dedicated student body.

I have spent my first couple of months meeting with and listening to those staff and students, and to our alumni and supporters. It is clear that we must continue to place our students and the quality of their experience at the heart of everything the University does.

I am struck by the passion and dedication of Birkbeck alumni. Volunteering time and giving financially has always been core to our growth and success. I know many of you regularly support our students through Birkbeck's flagship mentoring programmes. Your continued support will be critical as we embark on our third century.

As a lifelong learning institution, forging lifelong relationships is core to our mission. That is why we will continue to offer our Lifelong Learning Guarantee to all alumni, entitling you to a discount on any future study at Birkbeck. Whenever you need it, a Birkbeck education will be open to you (p37).

Last, I would like to introduce this year's edition of BBK, our alumni and supporter magazine. It focuses on Birkbeck's global community of change-makers. Take Laurence Bouvard for example, who you will meet on the next page. As a Computer Science alumna, professional actor and true lifelong learner, she is now contributing to key discussions on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in the entertainment industry.

I hope you enjoy reading about the impact of our community.

**Professor Sally Wheeler, OBE, MRJA, FAcSS
Vice-Chancellor**

The past year was a significant one as we celebrated a remarkable milestone – 200 years of Birkbeck.

Looking back at our history and founding mission was a compelling reminder of the value of what Birkbeck does. It also reiterated our responsibility to remain true to that mission, of making higher education accessible to all who aspire to attain it.

We are a University that both celebrates its past and looks to the future. In 2023, Birkbeck continued to modernise and innovate to meet the evolving needs of our student community. The University piloted new academic programmes, daytime teaching for popular subjects, and cutting-edge technology to allow those studying remotely to participate fully in learning activities.

2023 was a year of change for me too. I was honoured to be appointed as Birkbeck's new Vice-Chancellor. I returned to the UK after leaving my post as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International and Corporate) at the Australian National University and began my role at Birkbeck in January 2024.

CHALLENGING THE CREATIVITY OF AI



“The things that excite and challenge us are unique and weird and odd. These are the things that AI may factor out.”

.....
“Laurence Bouvard (MSc Computer Science, 2010) is deeply involved in discussions about the growing impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the creative industries. With a master’s degree in Computer Science from Birkbeck, and more than 20 years of experience as a professional actor and voice actor, she is uniquely positioned to bridge this divide.”
.....

Laurence always wanted to be an actor. But growing up in Boston as a ‘small, skinny and nerdy’ child in a household of academics, it never felt like a possibility.

Instead she studied linguistics at Harvard: “They didn’t have a theatre major, and I loved languages. I already spoke French, Italian and English because of my parents’ heritage.” She was later accepted onto Harvard’s PhD programme, but instead secretly auditioned for drama school in London.

Almost immediately after graduating from the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA), she made her professional debut in the role of Maria Elena Holly in the original cast of the West End musical, *Buddy*. Since then she has worked in film, TV, radio, audiobooks and video games.

“As a true nerd, I was fascinated by the world of video games,” Laurence explains. She began voice acting for video games in the late 1990s. At the time, they were viewed as “side-jobs you take between real jobs”. But now, with the video game industry worth almost double the film and music industry combined, and A-list actors taking roles in games, the perception has changed significantly. “It’s come a long way,” she says. “Now studios are more inclined to bring actors in from the beginning to help shape the characters. There have been some great emotional arcs in my recent projects.”

For Laurence, part of her motivation for studying Computer Science at Birkbeck was the chance to learn more about the technologies that were increasingly governing the entertainment industry: “As a performer, I always want to add other strings to my bow. Although I didn’t know the direction it would take me in.

“I was one of the only women on the course and virtually everyone else was already working in the tech industry. It was a steep learning curve. But

the moments of revelation when things clicked into place were very satisfying.

“I remember our tutor talking about combining different programmed objects. He compared this to ‘building a robot, like in the cartoon, *Robotboy*.’ I laughed at this and everyone looked at me. I told them that I voiced the character of Robotboy. They hadn’t previously known about my day job and all began asking, ‘why are you doing this?’

“I’m not sure the Professor ever looked at me the same, but everyone was very supportive and generous with their time.”

Now, with the rise of AI, Laurence has found an additional calling at the frontline of discussions about its use in creative industries: “Thanks to this course, I am now able to explain the implications of the technology to my colleagues. I can also speak to the companies about the impact of their product on performers.”

As the Chair of trade union Equity’s Screen and New Media Committee, Laurence was recently asked to speak on this subject in Parliament. She explained that current legislation does not protect performers. It is industry standard that to work and get paid performers must sign away their rights in perpetuity: “That clause means so much more now because there is technology that wasn’t around when you signed the contracts. Technology that can scrape and replicate voices, and make them say anything for anyone, without the actor being paid or recognised. There have been cases of my colleagues competing for work against their own voice. It is already happening.”

Ultimately, Laurence is keen for a redressing of the power balance. She wants the developers of these tools to understand that what is being used is not free, and more questioning of whether we should do things just because we can.

“AI has some incredible uses. It can process huge swathes of data and identify patterns incredibly quickly. However, for creative applications, this means it will give you the average, or the norm. An amalgamation of what already exists. But the arts are based on outliers. The things that excite and challenge us are unique and weird and odd. These are the things that AI may factor out. That is why I think we must be careful.”

UNDERSTANDING GAMING DISORDER

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Dr Halley Pontes, Senior Lecturer in Psychological Sciences, is conducting research into video game addiction, how it impacts peoples' lives and how diagnosis and treatment can be improved.
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In the UK, an estimated 80% of the population play video games at least once per week. Typically, up to 5% of all gamers develop an addiction to gaming. Defined as 'a pattern of gaming behaviour characterised by impaired control over gaming', the World Health Organisation (WHO) recognised gaming disorder as a mental health condition in 2019. The disorder also typically sees 'the continuation or escalation of gaming despite negative consequences.'

Dr Pontes was first drawn to studying technological addictions in 2011: "While practicing clinical psychology I realised that many young clients struggled with their gaming behaviour. They had also often been stigmatised and had their experiences discredited by those who did not believe someone could become addicted to video games. It was clear that more research was needed to be able to provide answers to these individuals."

Now a Senior Lecturer at Birkbeck, Dr Pontes has spent the last decade looking into gaming disorder. "We have found that more than 50% of individuals with gaming disorder report that it negatively affects their work," he explains. "Health practitioners therefore need to focus treatment on diminishing the symptoms of gaming disorder and helping individuals to mitigate impairments to professional or academic activities."

In one of his studies, 4,500 young male gamers responded to questions about their online activities. This included sections on gaming, gambling, online shopping, pornography and social networking. He found that there was a correlation between individuals with gaming

disorder and other problematic online behaviours. However, his research also indicated that these other online activities must still be seen as separate issues or conditions.

"I hope my research helps people think about gaming disorder as a mental health condition in which individuals experience a host of social and psychological impairments," he says. "It is key that we use evidence from research to help improve the lives of those affected, to educate the wider public and help shape national policies aimed at reducing the harms associated with gaming disorder."

Halley's current project explores the relationship between gaming disorder and the esports community. Esports are organised, multiplayer video game competitions. "Our initial findings show that gamers who make a living out of playing video games appear to be at greater risk of gaming disorder. Given that many younger individuals aspire to become internet celebrities as influencers, live streamers, or professional gamers, it is important that we understand the opportunities and risks of these potential career pathways from a psychological perspective.

"That is what we are hoping to learn more on as this project progresses."

THE RISE OF INFLUENCER MARKETING



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New research from Dr Benedetta Crisafulli, Reader in Marketing, examines the proliferation of social media influencers and questions how companies can deploy the right influencers to maximise their selling power.
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The concept of 'ordinary' people selling to the public is not a new phenomenon. In the late 1970s, there were six million door-to-door Avon representatives worldwide. They would sell cosmetics and toiletries, as well as the opportunity to go into business as an 'Avon lady'. This is an early example of how organisations have long leveraged the influence of 'regular' people.

A new iteration of this practice is changing how companies engage with consumers. The growth of social media has brought with it a wave of influencers that carry tremendous weight among their followers. Companies now recognise the potential of these influencers. In 2023, the global market value of influencer marketing stood at \$21.1 billion dollars, having more than tripled since 2019.

Despite the huge sums of money involved, there is little academic research on this subject. Dr Crisafulli's work offers advice on how to select influencers, when to leverage their endorsements and the pitfalls to avoid.

"In our study on business-to-business marketing in the tech sector, we created two different profiles for influencers. One portrayed high competence (e.g., skill and ability), while another was depicted as high in warmth (e.g., friendliness and care). We then assessed the willingness of professionals to purchase a technological solution presented by the different influencers. The influencers' characteristics made a clear difference when buyers were selecting and evaluating an offering. It was apparent that competence was pivotal in buyers' decision-making, whereas friendliness, helpfulness and sincerity were comparatively less meaningful."

A further study by Dr Crisafulli looked at the importance of the context in which an influencers' endorsement is deployed: "We looked specifically at the efficacy of influencer marketing for brands facing a scandal.

"We found that it is very difficult for consumers' positive sentiment to be restored if influencers get involved in a brand's PR efforts. This is because the public often interpret the brand-influencer response as manipulative. The only way to offset this is for the brand and influencer to openly disclose why they have joined efforts in addressing the scandal."

Dr Crisafulli is the principal investigator on a new, funded research project on the impact of influencer marketing on society.

LIFE AS AN OUTSIDER



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Samuel Kasumu (Postgraduate Diploma in Ethnicity, Migration, Policy, 2013) was a special adviser to Prime Minister Boris Johnson. He is now a co-founder at Inclusive Boards, which supports organisations to develop more diverse boards and senior leadership teams.
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Samuel claims to never have been particularly interested in politics. He describes his journey as 'falling' into it, which started during his undergraduate degree at Brunel University. Someone from the Students' Union prevented him from running an event that he was passionate about, so he decided to run for Vice President of the Union. He won with a record number of votes.

Fast forward several years and a few different roles in community engagement and youth employment, and Samuel was a special adviser to the Prime Minister on the Civil Society and Communities brief. "Working in Downing Street was very reactionary. Almost every morning I'd wake up to a phone full of messages with updates on what was happening in the UK and journalists asking me for comment. I'd then stumble into back-to-back meetings all day and would try to make decisions in the afternoon.

"Speaking to the right people was key to gathering the knowledge to make the best decisions I could. This was certainly the case when I worked on Home Office reform after the Windrush scandal began in 2018, and during the review into how the Civil Service could increase diversity in senior roles. It all prepared me to lead on the deployment of the Covid-19 vaccine, which obviously had to move very quickly."

Until his resignation in 2021, Samuel was the most senior Black adviser in government. His experiences served as inspiration for his new book, *The Power of the Outsider: A Journey of Discovery*. "When I left Downing Street, I had time to reflect on what I'd achieved and how different my schooling and upbringing was to most of my colleagues. I thought about how I'd navigated that space and I wanted to write a blueprint that could help others.

"When you bring together people from different backgrounds, you can make decisions that are better for everyone."

"Diversity matters. When you bring together people from different backgrounds, you can make decisions that are better for everyone because you understand other people's journeys and challenges."

Samuel credits Birkbeck with helping him lay the foundations for his career: "I was younger than a lot of the students in my cohort and so I learnt from them and their life experience, as well as from the lecturers. I still admire Birkbeck's commitment to helping people from all walks of life to grow academically." Samuel's desire to support others to achieve their ambitions led to him co-founding Inclusive Boards, a diversity search firm that offers recruitment, advisory services and training on diversity.

On the future of British politics and whether he will venture back into that world, he says: "It feels like the public want something different, so I think a big change is coming after the next election. I don't know if I will return to politics. For now, I'm happy to be working on getting interesting people on non-executive boards and supporting leadership teams to make a difference."



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Current student Harris Hendra (MSc Computer Science) was born Deaf. Growing up in Indonesia he struggled to find schools and jobs that supported his needs. Now at Birkbeck, Harris sees a bright future for himself and is set on pursuing a career in tech.
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In Indonesia, I moved schools three times in six years, searching for the right special education school that could help me make sense of life and communicate with people through lip-reading. Unfortunately, Indonesia is not great at making adjustments for disabilities. Eventually, I returned to study at non-specialist schools through to university.

After graduating I worked as a graphic designer for four years. It was a challenging environment for me because not much was done to help me succeed. I then decided to pursue further education in the UK, hoping for a better career and a more supportive environment.

“I was anxious at the start of term, but it certainly hasn’t been as difficult as I feared.”

I’m studying Computer Science, partially because both my siblings have careers in tech. My goal is to follow in their footsteps and become a software developer.

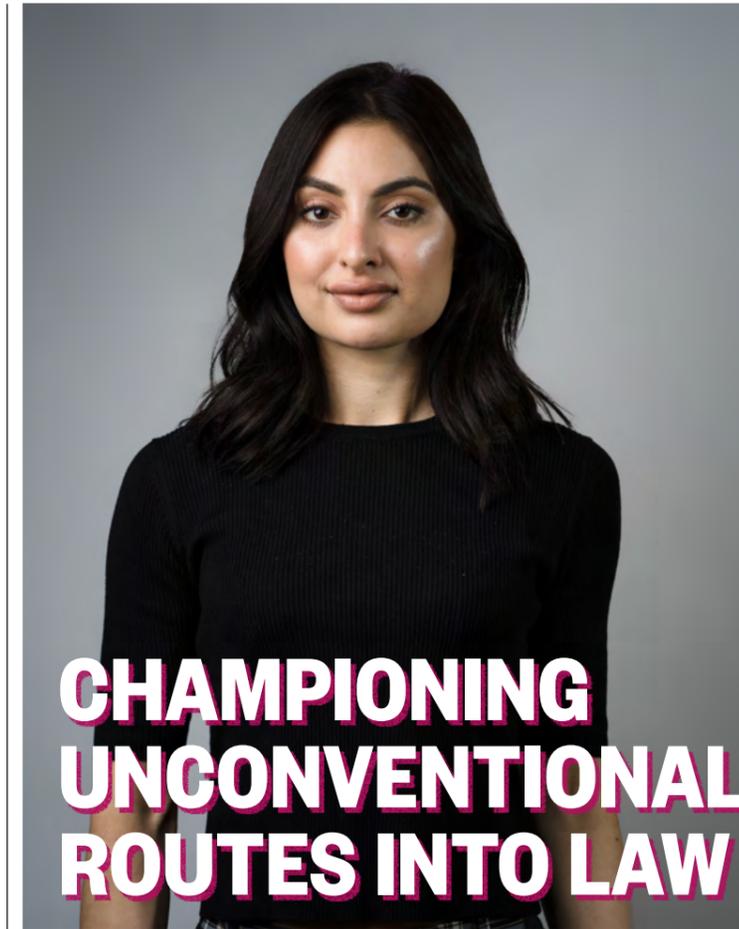
My journey at Birkbeck and in London has been a blend of challenges, learning and personal growth. I was anxious at the start of term, but looking back, it certainly hasn’t been as difficult as I feared. My utmost gratitude goes to the Disability and Dyslexia Service at Birkbeck. They have been instrumental to my academic success. They enabled subtitles in virtual classrooms and provided voice-to-text applications for daily conversations. While these tools are rarely perfect, they have been effective in aiding my studies. The lecturers have been very supportive and accommodating too.

One of the challenges has been that most people in the UK who are Deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus, use British Sign Language (BSL) to communicate. I grew up learning Indonesian Sign Language (BISINDO). It’s surprising how different sign languages can be, and it can feel like learning an entirely new language. But I’ve managed to teach myself up to Level 1 on YouTube!

Despite this, my social experience at Birkbeck has been enriching and far from solitary. I participate in the dance club, connect with the Deaf community outside of campus, and attend various events at my residence halls. It is nice to be able to interact with a diverse group of students and have a well-rounded university experience.

People with disabilities are more likely to be apprehensive about pursuing higher education. Initially, I was hesitant too. The key is to build communities specifically for disabled students, so they know there are other people in the same boat and they can support each other.

With recent advancements in tech and improved understanding of disability needs, I am hopeful that the future is bright!



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Podcaster and Law graduate, Stephanie Anais (LLB Law, 2023), is navigating the creative and corporate worlds. She wants to pave the way for others to realise their potential and overcome barriers to entering the legal profession.
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Stephanie Anais has carved a unique career path, demonstrating that there are many routes to finding your passion. She left school with a handful of GCSEs, which Stephanie admits “were not the best grades” she could have achieved. In pursuit of a “fast paced and glamorous career” that suited her creative personality, she became a hairdresser at 16 years old.

But her willingness and ability to identify opportunities quickly took her elsewhere. She secured an internship with a journalist she met at the hair salon and travelled with them to support their work in Hollywood. Upon returning to the UK, she was determined to pursue a more corporate career. She held various temporary office jobs to gain experience before becoming a receptionist at Radcliffe Chambers. It was here that Stephanie was first exposed to the legal profession.

She decided to study Law at Birkbeck part-time, while also moving into the marketing team at Radcliffe. Stephanie threw herself into life as a law student. She later became President of Birkbeck’s Law Society

and won the 2023 National Accident Helpline’s Future Legal Mind competition. Throughout her studies, she was also committed to encouraging more diversity in the profession and supporting others with unconventional backgrounds.

Stephanie launched two podcasts in 2020, The Student Lawyer Podcast and #NOFILTER. Both feature the inspirational stories of entrepreneurs, business owners and legal professionals who share career advice and other aspects of their journeys in their respective fields.

“I launched The Student Lawyer Podcast to help improve social mobility within the legal industry by interviewing a diverse range of legal professionals and providing listeners with career advice and commercial awareness.

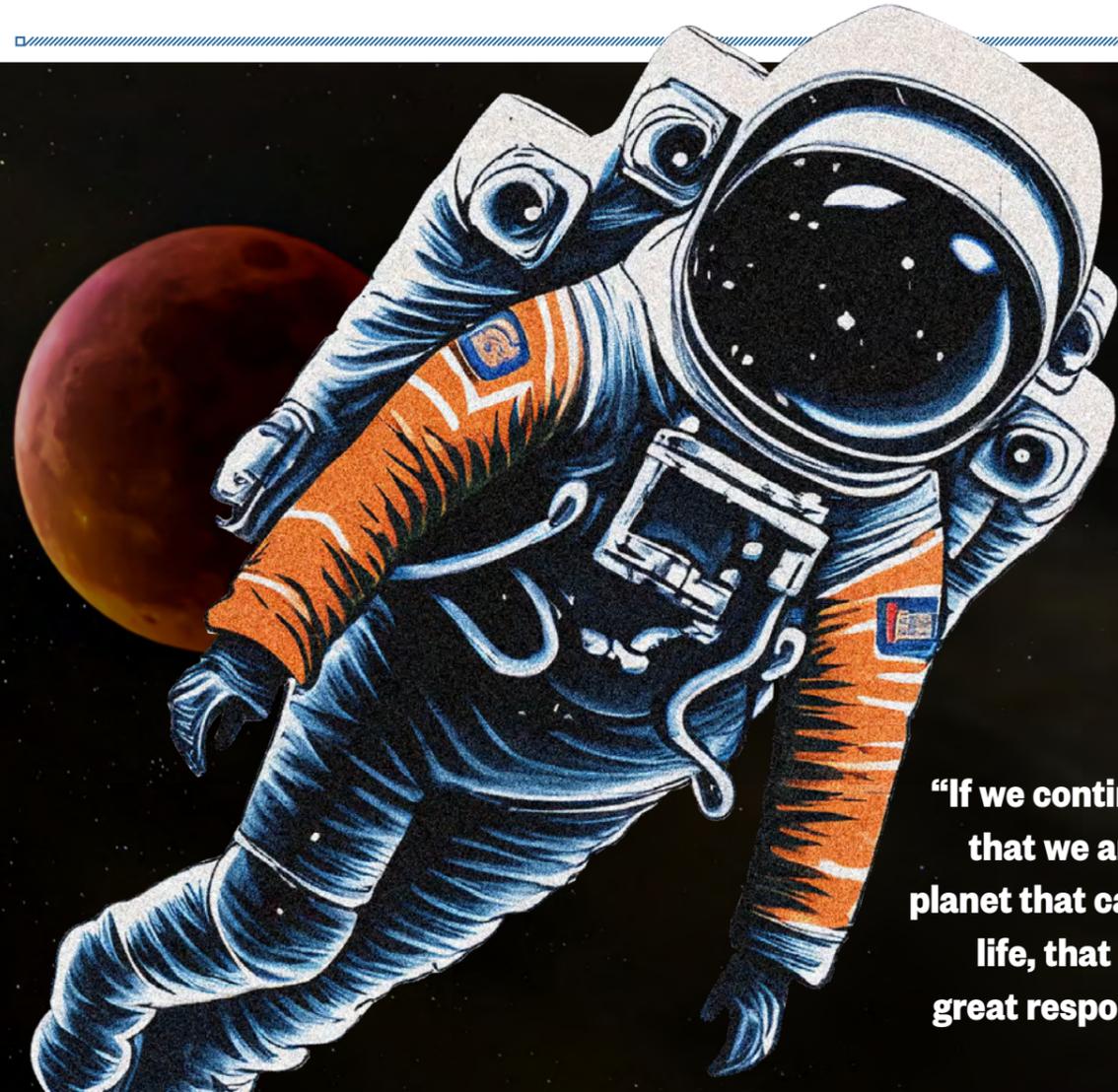
“Being commercially aware is something that law firms and barrister chambers always look for. It’s difficult to develop this type of knowledge, particularly if you haven’t grown up around people in those kinds of jobs. That’s why helping our listeners build those skills is important to me.

“I think it’s also important to demonstrate that it’s not necessary to fit the old-school depiction of a lawyer and that having an interesting and diverse background is not only accepted these days but highly valued.

“#NOFILTER is a business and careers podcast where I talk candidly to entrepreneurs and business owners about how they have built successful businesses from scratch and overcome challenges.”

Having now finished four years of study at Birkbeck, Stephanie is looking forward to starting her training contract with Clifford Chance, one of the world’s largest law firms. Her advice for others following in her footsteps is to “be open-minded, venture out of your comfort zone, make the most of the opportunities available at university, and always participate in Moot Club!”

THE EXPLORATION OF EXOPLANETS



“If we continue to find that we are the only planet that can support life, that presents a great responsibility...”

Dr Andrew Rushby is a leading figure in the study of worlds beyond our solar system, known as exoplanets. Through his research and teaching, he is working to illuminate the possibilities of life beyond Earth.

Dr Rushby, an astrobiologist and Programme Director for the new Astrobiology Master's degree at Birkbeck, has carved a niche in the scientific community by exploring exoplanets.

One of Dr Rushby's recent projects focused on the study of the TRAPPIST-1 planetary system, located approximately 40 light years away from Earth. To put that in perspective, one light-year is about 6 trillion miles.

TRAPPIST-1 houses a constellation of eight small planets orbiting a red dwarf star. Due to their proximity to the star, these small planets have become tidally locked, meaning they no longer rotate on their axes and now have one side permanently in day and the other permanently

in night. Dr Rushby's research delves into the peculiar climate dynamics of these tidally locked planets:

“On Earth, most of our weather comes from air rising at the equator and then moving north and south, where it becomes colder and denser. On TRAPPIST-1 planets, we expect that heat – which could be in the form of ocean circulation or winds – could come from the day side over to the night side. My research is about trying to figure out how that might work.”

To understand how heat distribution works in the absence of axial rotation, Dr Rushby looked at what the planets' surfaces were made of. He then examined how different surface compositions interacted with the unique wavelengths of light emitted by the TRAPPIST-1 star. His findings indicated that surfaces made of ice, which are typically expected to be reflective on planets orbiting the Sun, were instead absorbing excessive energy and melting rapidly. In contrast, land surfaces exhibited reflective properties,

potentially altering atmospheric circulation. The implications of these findings could transform our understanding of exoplanetary atmospheres and guide future telescopic observations.

Dr Rushby emphasises the symbiotic relationship between exoplanetary exploration and understanding Earth's climate and weather systems: “By exploring worlds beyond our solar system we can gather more data and information on the physics of atmospheres. This could help us learn more about environmental ‘tipping points’, and thereby improve our tools for predicting and managing Earth's climate. This is very relevant for us on Earth today.”

Dr Rushby's work also prompts philosophical, political and ethical considerations that may arise from the discovery of habitable planets or extra-terrestrial life.

“It's always worth thinking about life on Earth in a wider cosmic perspective. If we continue to find that we are the only planet that can support life,

that presents a great responsibility to look after Earth while we explore the Galaxy more widely. If we can find habitable planets, even better. But what would finding them mean for us? And who gets to make decisions about what we do with habitable planets?”

The new Astrobiology Master's degree at Birkbeck is the first of its kind in England. As a pioneer in this field and the new Programme Director, Dr Rushby is keen to share his passion with the next generation of scientists and thinkers who will tackle the profound questions of life beyond Earth.

“It's a very rigorous, robust physical science degree. It's going to help cultivate partnerships with the commercial space industry, which is fledgling here in the UK. The time is ripe for commercial space interest and applications. I can see the students from this course going on to become thought leaders, researchers, and even commercial partners driving the quest for answers about life in the universe.”



ART AS A FORM OF ADVOCACY



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With a career in the art world spanning more than three decades, Gilane Tawadros (LLM Human Rights, 2009) uses her work to explore questions of race and inequality in culture and society.
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Gilane is a curator, writer and the director of London's Whitechapel Gallery. Previously, she was the founding director of The Institute of International Visual Arts (Iniva), which champions the work of artists from different cultural backgrounds, engaging with questions of nationhood, difference and globalisation.

The same themes inform her work with Whitechapel Gallery, which was established in 1901 to bring art to the people of London's East End: "The Gallery has always had a sense of itself as being locally embedded and globally connected because the communities of the East End come from all over the world. We don't just want to reach out to the community, we want them to reach back. We want their knowledge, experience and imagination to permeate and influence the institution."

In the summer of 2023, Whitechapel Gallery hosted a 'local takeover,' in which they collaborated with local community groups and artists with East End roots to co-curate exhibitions, events and a gallery radio station. Speaking about experiences and issues that concern the local community, such as migration and gentrification, the takeover had a significant impact, with 47% of attendees (who participated in a survey) being first-time visitors to the Gallery.

"It's commonly thought that because we're in a very digitised age, gallery spaces aren't useful anymore," she says. "But actually, our saturation in the digital and virtual has highlighted how vital it is to have a physical space dedicated to thinking and dreaming and imagining."

With the current cost-of-living crisis, Gilane is concerned that the arts sector's funding will be squeezed further because it is not considered important for national wellbeing. "It's a false dichotomy to pit essential needs like health, education, housing and employment against the arts. Of course, we must have those services. But if that's all we have, then we are just existing. Culture and art sustain us socially, spiritually and creatively. They allow us to transcend mere survival and consider why and how we exist."

Gilane also believes that learning sustains us. She decided to study Human Rights Law at Birkbeck in 2008, having long been engaged with social justice issues. "It is essential that people can also pursue education without a direct end goal, but as a way of developing their critical thinking, depth of understanding and sense of the world. At Birkbeck, there was an extraordinary range of people with so much life knowledge and experience. It was such a rich learning environment."

While studying, Gilane came to see how every facet of society has a role to play in social justice. "Through my research, which looked at rights and representations in the work of contemporary artists, I realised that some of the most powerful interventions in the human rights space had been made by artists.

"Doris Salcedo, for example, has been praised for her original approach to drawing attention to public tragedy and violence. Her work demonstrates that art has a role to play in social justice alongside legal considerations. We need to think in a more holistic way, drawing together different disciplines, and local and global perspectives, to address social justice."

DRESSING UP FOR SCHOOL



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With much debate around the enforcement, cost and politics of school uniforms, Professor Daniel Monk, School of Law, is researching the complex relationship between school dress codes, adult concerns and anxieties, and children's welfare and rights.
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School dress codes exist in almost every school in the UK, yet there is very little central regulation on what children can and cannot wear.

For Professor Monk, the rules and regulations of school dress codes are a fascinating "daily battleground" between children, parents and the teachers tasked to enforce them. His new project aims to unravel the motivations for dress codes, why schools have such different policies, and what they can tell us about contemporary perspectives on gender, race, religion, class and sexuality.

Part of this project will involve taking a long-view. He describes school uniforms as part of a "very British story", referring to the rarity of uniforms in most comparable European countries. "School uniforms were first introduced in England in the 16th century for the poorest children. Their origin can be traced to Christ's Hospital Boarding School where the 'charity' children in attendance were given blue cloaks and yellow stockings."

"Much later, in the 1970s, there was a moment of more informality. For example, ties became optional in many schools. But now, particularly with 'academisation', we are seeing a return to much stricter codes being imposed – either with uniforms or detailed dress codes about types of clothes, hairstyles and jewellery."

Professor Monk suggests that examining the trends of generational and historical conflict relating to dress codes and uniforms reveals that they often have very little to do with children and their experiences. Instead they are related to much broader societal concerns and anxieties. Debates about school dress codes tend to be framed by conflicting approaches to children's rights, according to Professor Monk: "Arguments against dress codes and uniforms are often based on liberal, individualist thinking, and support greater autonomy for children."

"These are pitted against more welfarist claims about the individual and collective benefits of uniforms, such as economic savings, social cohesion and school behaviour. However, there are many other things going on under the surface, and that's what I am keen to uncover."

One element of his project will examine the dress code disputes that reach the courts: "Even though it is common to see headlines where boys have argued for the right to wear skirts, or about children wearing hairstyles associated with their religion or ethnicity, very few of these conflicts end up in a courtroom. The small number of litigated cases are fascinating. But for this project, it will also be important to find out what is happening on a day-to-day basis in schools."

Professor Monk will conduct empirical research involving talking to headteachers and school governors, looking into school archives, and working with young people to understand their experiences.

As this project progresses, he hopes to foster and improve conversations around dress codes, and encourage people to consider locating them in a social and historical context: "It is an issue that is very important to children, so it is integral that we do not take dress codes for granted or accept that they must be enforced in a particular way."



DEVELOPING TEACHING IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

Birkbeck is known for providing a university education that enables students to work or pursue other interests while studying. In recent years, demand for evening learning and the broad range of subjects taught at Birkbeck has been affected by societal and economic change.

Some subjects, such as management, business, law and psychology have grown in popularity, while some subject areas have experienced drops in demand. Fewer people are making the daily commute to central London for work. Demand from European students has declined, but demand from non-EU, overseas students has increased. The number of students at Birkbeck who are disabled or have a declared mental health condition has also increased.

Now, Birkbeck is developing its offer to keep pace with change and improve flexibility and choice. "We are harnessing new technology and innovating to ensure that we can offer the subjects students and employers want, in the ways students want to learn," says Professor Diane Houston, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education.

DAYTIME CLASSES

From September 2024, Birkbeck will pilot daytime teaching across a range of undergraduate courses. This, in tandem with the provision of excellent online learning resources, provides students with greater choice over when and how they study.

Daytime teaching on full-time courses will bring students to campus for three afternoons per week.

NEW COURSES

Ten new undergraduate programmes were introduced from October 2023, expanding Birkbeck's provision in health and social care, business, law, and the natural sciences.

We plan to further develop the University's undergraduate and postgraduate offer, including a focus on environment and sustainability, health and artificial intelligence.

NEW TECHNOLOGY

Birkbeck is currently piloting new technology, known as 'HyFlex', that synchronises in-person and online learning, enabling those studying remotely to participate fully in lessons. Over the next three years, almost every Birkbeck classroom will be fitted with this technology.

This development is supported by a £3 million grant from the Office for Students, which will also assist the creation of a virtual reality suite, to allow new immersive learning experiences to be developed.

"I'm enjoying teaching with HyFlex," says Dr Ken Hori, Reader, Birkbeck Business School. "I've seen online and in-person students working together and helping each other. They all feel part of one class."

"It's particularly important for us because our students tend to be time-poor, and have a variety of different needs," explains Professor Houston. "HyFlex will help support those needs and cement our position as one of the most inclusive and flexible places to study in the UK."



ARTIFICIAL WOMBS AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

The development of artificial wombs raises a host of new ethical, legal and socio-political questions. This life-saving technology could be introduced to society within the next generation and become part of how we understand pregnancy. Dr Claire Horn (PhD Law, 2020) is a passionate advocate for reproductive justice and the author of a new book on the impact of technology on reproductive rights.

An artificial womb is a device that allows a foetus to survive and grow outside of the human body. This technology could improve survival outcomes for preterm babies. Although they are yet to be tested on humans, similar devices have already successfully developed healthy baby animals.

The introduction of technologies that support healthy and safe pregnancies will undoubtedly bring many benefits. However, like many new technologies, they are developed at such speed that the social conversation cannot keep up. "Moral, legal and ethical considerations can thereby become an afterthought," Dr Horn explains.

Following a research internship with an advocacy group for pregnant people in New York, Dr Horn joined Birkbeck on a funded fellowship. At the University, she developed a project championing reproductive justice with a focus on the impact of artificial wombs. Birkbeck helped inspire her research direction and brought her into contact with students and academics who shared her passion for feminist advocacy.

With her new book *Eve: The Disobedient Future of Birth*, Dr Horn looks to raise awareness of the potential impacts of reproductive technologies and contemporary discussions on reproductive rights.

While artificial wombs were originally conceptualised and developed as instruments to support pregnant people, Dr Horn cautions that "any technology facilitating the survival of the foetus at an earlier stage will have an impact on reproductive laws." Abortion legislation is typically developed in line with our understanding of how early a foetus could survive outside of the womb.

Dr Horn suggests that if artificial wombs are developed to ensure the survival of extremely premature babies, this could be used as an argument to reduce the time frame in which people can access safe and legal abortions. This may lead to a paradoxical situation where the very technology created to empower and support pregnant people would instead be used to limit their autonomy and reproductive rights.

Dr Horn describes this tension as a "law problem, not a technology problem." She contends that artificial wombs themselves do not present a threat to society but highlight how new technologies can disrupt existing legislative systems and societal norms.

"At present, all humans are united by the shared experience of being born from another person."

While many may not consider reproductive rights or technologies as having a great effect on their day-to-day lives, Dr Horn reminds us that at present, "all humans are united by the shared experience of being born from another person." She encourages us to recognise what we have in common and be aware of technological changes that have the potential to affect our rights and our future.

CHOOSING SOLO MOTHERHOOD



Today, many women are choosing to have children on their own using sperm, egg or embryo donors. Dr Grace Halden, Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature, has been conducting research into how solo motherhood is presented and perceived in contemporary culture.

A personal decision inspired Dr Halden's academic journey into solo motherhood: "In 2018, I chose to conceive a child as a solo mother through sperm donation. I immediately noticed that there was very little academic work specifically on solo parenthood. This led me to investigate how solo mothers are portrayed, discussed and narrated in popular culture."

Single mothers have long been stigmatised in media and film, and the media tend to show children from single parents as having poorer outcomes:

"The general idea is that they are reckless and negligent, which leads to the child being disadvantaged. This stems from twentieth century societal concerns that single parents created families that were state-dependent, or children more likely to commit crime."

Dr Halden's work brings together different voices from medical humanities, social sciences, literature and culture, to combat these negative and often false portrayals. This contributes to the bioethical debate about bringing children into single-parent homes.

"Solo and single parents are now more likely to be educated and career-driven, but people often feel that these things cannot exist together. There is great research from social science disciplines showing that if children conceived by donor conception are raised with love and transparency about their background, their outcomes are no different to children raised in heteronormative family environments.

"It's important that as a society we move away from the narrative that a traditional heteronormative nuclear family is the only way of parenting and everything else is a diversion from that."

"I talked honestly about how I was treated in fertility clinics because it felt disingenuous to write as if I was removed from this."

Dr Halden also looks at the often-ignored voices of single parents by choice, to understand their motivations and lived experiences. She used these interviews and her own personal experiences to write and publish a guide on solo motherhood, funded by the Wellcome Trust. This guide is targeted at fertility clinics and industry professionals to highlight a different perspective and offer suggestions on how solo motherhood could be better portrayed in medical environments.

"I talked honestly about how I was treated in fertility clinics because it felt disingenuous to write as if I was removed from this. It feels more powerful to add in this personal writing and I wish I had had the confidence to do this in my previous works!"

She is now writing a book, *Cyborg Conception: Cultural and Critical Responses to Solo Motherhood by Choice*, in which she delves into the history and growth of donor conception, as well as sharing her personal experiences.

"Through writing the book, I have a much deeper personal appreciation for what has been achieved through the feminist movement that allows me to have the lifestyle that I have now. I also keenly feel the deep connection to stories of women who have been hounded and stigmatised for being single parents," she says.

In 2023, Dr Halden was awarded the Birkbeck Ronald Tress Prize, which celebrates excellence in research by early career academics: "I studied my PhD at Birkbeck and never left because I love it. It was a great environment as a student and it remains a supportive, rich and rewarding research environment as an academic."

GOING FOR GOLD



.....
Giedrė Rakauskaitė (MSc Sport Management, 2022–24) won gold at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games for rowing in the PR3 mixed coxed four. As the reigning European Champion in that boat class, Giedrė now has her sights on gold at Paris 2024. While preparing to compete, she is also preparing for her future by studying Sport Management at Birkbeck.
.....

When I took up rowing aged 14, I genuinely believed that I could one day compete on the international stage. A year later, I was involved in a car accident that resulted in a long road to recovery. I was put in an intensive care unit for two weeks, then in plastic surgery for a month. A lot of physiotherapy followed and I had multiple surgeries over the year.

But as soon as I was walking again without crutches – actually before I even started walking – I began going to training sessions. I was desperately clinging onto the sport, and it brought life back to me.

I started rowing after being picked out by a coach during an athletics competition in Kaunas, Lithuania, where I grew up. I immediately loved the environment, the teamwork in the boat. It's different to other team sports in that everyone has to contribute in equal measure throughout a race. In our team of four, I'm always responsible for 25% of our power. You never feel left out.

Although the possibility of going to the Olympics was taken away from me, I knew I wanted to stay in sport. The Paralympics is amazing at showcasing the resilience of people. Some of my teammates have paralysis in their backs after cycling accidents. Some of them are ex-army. It is remarkable what humans can do when they don't give up.

Training for the Paralympics has also taught me how to approach academic study. I was inspired by one of my teammates who started her studies after Tokyo. I want to

be a coach one day and I know that you need a solid academic background.

So I applied to Birkbeck to learn more about the business of sport and to build a theoretical background to everything I was doing day-to-day. The balance of doing both can be a struggle.

When I've been away in training camps or at international competitions, I have often joined lectures virtually while sitting at the dinner table with my team. Fortunately, both the team and my lecturers have been understanding.

Receiving a scholarship from Birkbeck has relieved a lot of stress. While studying and practising sport, I still have to rent a house, pay my bills and travel for two hours to get to my lectures. It's made it a lot easier to pursue my goals and focus on my future.

As a teenager, I spent a lot of time in hospitals and in rehab. Sport was the force that taught me how to be resilient, believe in myself and work hard. What matters to me now is helping others to find that and realise their potential. After my sporting career, I would like to work with aspiring athletes – making them believe in themselves and helping them achieve.

Support for students like Giedrė is made possible by Birkbeck's alumni and supporter community. Alumnus Tim Edwards (MSc Sports Management, 2007) and his wife Liz provided scholarship funding for Giedrė because of their commitment to promoting diverse talent in sport and supporting the next generation of women in the industry.

To find out how you can help Birkbeck students pursue their higher education goals, please contact Rachna Purdie, Deputy Director of Philanthropy at r.purdie@bbk.ac.uk.

REGULATING RAPID CHANGE



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Ofcom CEO Dame Melanie Dawes (MSc Economics, 1989) reflects on the challenges and opportunities of regulating amid rapid technological change and the crucial role that diversity plays.
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Just two weeks before the nation went into lockdown, Dame Melanie Dawes became chief executive of Ofcom, the UK's communications regulator for TV, radio, video-on-demand, mobile, post and more. Later that year, Ofcom was appointed as the regulator for online safety in the UK and tasked with implementing the Online Safety Bill.

Before grappling with some of the biggest public policy challenges facing the country, Melanie began her career in the Civil Service after a master's degree in Economics at Birkbeck.

"I just loved my time here. I met someone on my course who was already an economist in the Civil Service and as she talked about what she did, something clicked for me. It made me realise how I could take economics and apply it to real life to improve things." Melanie went on to hold various senior positions in the Civil Service including permanent secretary for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. However, the path to senior roles wasn't always clear.

When I joined in 1989, there were very few female economists at any level, and there certainly weren't any women's networks to support progression. I remember in the mid-90s, two senior female economists came back from maternity leave and were able to work part-time in their roles, and that was completely unheard of! So they sort of became role models to us. Obviously, we've come a long way since then."

As a champion for diversity and inclusion in the Civil Service, Melanie helped push the system to recognise the imbalances that need to be addressed: "I think everyone has to work hard to put themselves in other peoples' shoes. One of the things that really helped this was 'reverse mentoring' – where a senior leader is mentored by a younger or more junior employee. I remember being mentored by a gay colleague who spoke to me about their experiences in the 80s and 90s and the barriers they faced. It massively helped my understanding."

"Birkbeck brings together a diversity of people and experiences that is truly magic."

Melanie has taken this attitude with her to Ofcom. As their team has grown by 400 people since 2020, she has looked to support both diversity in expertise and in lived experience. "Every organisation needs that range of views and experiences, particularly public bodies that are serving the UK's nations and regions. It's about creating a healthy and inclusive culture that a variety of people want to be part of and will feel valued working in."

To tackle the mammoth challenge of online safety, Ofcom has brought in more people who understand the way digital technologies work. "We've got fantastic experience and skills, but it's a huge responsibility to take that forward with global platforms that are used at such scale by so many people in the UK. There's also the broader challenge of generative AI and large language models, which are transforming so many industries. So there's some real change coming that will be hard to predict."

With this rapid change, anchoring decisions to real-life concerns helps Melanie prioritise: "We always ask ourselves the question, where are our consumers, what are they worried about? What do they really care about when we're talking about social media? It is about protecting people from harm while also upholding freedom of expression and market competition. So once we've gathered evidence we often have quite challenging internal discussions about where to intervene in markets and how to justify it. That's why it is so interesting. Thirty years in the Civil Service prepared me for this challenge. And I owe my Civil Service career to Birkbeck!"

In 2022, Melanie was appointed a Fellow of the University. "I was just so proud. I have such happy memories of my time here, and such respect for the people rushing from work to then learn late into the night. Birkbeck provides for those people and in doing so, it brings together a diversity of people and experiences that is truly magic."

CREATING PATHWAYS TO HIGHER EDUCATION



Birkbeck's Access and Engagement Team are industry leaders in improving access to education for non-traditional students and supporting their academic success.

At the heart of Birkbeck's award-winning provision is a commitment to ensuring that the University is welcoming, supportive and accessible to students who face many barriers to access and inclusion. To achieve this, the team:

- collaborate with further education colleges and schools to encourage and support smooth transitions into university study.
- work with grassroots groups, voluntary organisations and statutory services to deliver adult learning opportunities in community settings. These include workshops, informal drop-in sessions, and five-week taster courses.
- run a programme of support for people from forced migrant backgrounds who wish to continue their education.

We spoke to three programme attendees to understand the people that access these services and the impact they have:

MARK, 62

Mark is a former chef who now works in mental health support. He has a number of health issues that at times have prevented him from working, or even leaving his home.

"I attended the 'Fake or Real News' workshops, where we examined real examples of fake news stories. They were a brilliant opportunity to refamiliarise myself with critical thinking, information retention and other key skills for higher education.

"It was much needed encouragement to get out of my flat and become more comfortable doing so. My confidence has been boosted by being able to interact at a high intellectual level with similar people. It also made me realise that I could probably handle a part-time Psychology degree. I'm definitely considering applying to Birkbeck.

"I couldn't praise it enough actually. I would do more workshops in a heartbeat."

ANTOINETTE, 48

Antoinette is a single mum of five and is heavily involved in local community work. She is also a trained leadership coach.

"I did a taster course in Community Leadership. Learning has always been important to me and I love the university environment, even though I didn't complete my last degree many years ago. The main thing I took away was an understanding of how we can work together to achieve a common goal. It's all about growing and learning together.

"The whole experience was monumental for me. I met some brilliant people and I've ended up working with them on community projects, like building a community garden.

"I'm very passionate about the environment, so I'm tempted to study one of Birkbeck's sustainability courses – if I have the time!"

FREDERIC, 52

Since arriving in the UK, Frederic has spent 30 years working in luxury hospitality. After the pandemic he realised he was burnt out, so decided to take some time off to reassess.

"I can't stay still. I just love to learn new things. I saw the Community Leadership course advertised and knew it would be a great way to look at how we can give back to society. It gave me an opportunity to self-heal, to keep busy and do something different.

"The course facilitators seamlessly put themselves into the shoes of older students. They put us all at ease.

"There was helpful, structured information on how to make community projects work, like how to apply for grants. I have since become involved with a local foodbank and I'm helping to develop their systems of production and service.

"It has re-energised me and I'm excited to get my career going again."



MENTORING PATHWAYS

For nearly a decade, the Mentoring Pathways programme has welcomed hundreds of alumni and corporate volunteers who help Birkbeck students achieve their professional and personal goals.

This year's programme introduced the first-ever Mentoring Pathways Awards to celebrate their achievements. Lauren Henry (MSc Climate Change, 2023) received the inaugural Mentee of the Year award in recognition of her development on the programme:

"As a student, I lacked confidence and was worried that becoming a mother halfway through my degree would impact my ambitions. Through Mentoring Pathways, I met Claire Prescott (MSc Global Environmental Politics & Policy, 2018). She really helped strengthen my self-belief. Claire was genuinely invested in my development and taught me to speak about my abilities with greater confidence. Together we explored a variety of roles that would suit my skill set and interests.

"I was not expecting to win the award and my progress was only possible thanks to my incredible mentor. I feel inspired and excited to turn my dreams into reality!"

"I realised that I can be a researcher and have my dream career as well as being a mum!"

WHY VOLUNTEER FOR MENTORING PATHWAYS?

Mentoring benefits Birkbeck students, but also offers our mentors a unique opportunity to improve their professional skills and connect with our volunteering community. Chloe Threadgold (MSc International Marketing, 2020) was the Runner-Up for the Mentor of the Year prize:

"Volunteering as a mentor gave me more confidence in my abilities and expertise. Even if I don't have all the answers, I can ask the right questions to help people come to their own conclusions.

"Winning a Mentor of the Year prize was a huge surprise and helped me see the impact I'd had. I really enjoyed meeting someone new and hearing a different perspective on the world, but with the shared experience of studying at Birkbeck."



STAYING INVOLVED WITH BIRKBECK

DEBONTIKA DAS

(MSc Occupational Psychology, 2018)

Debontika spoke at an event celebrating the achievements of our international students, sharing her inspiring career journey.

"I consider myself so fortunate to have these opportunities to interact with current students. Talking about my time at the University, my experiences and my amazing career at HCLTech really makes me realise how far I've come but also how much I still have to learn and explore."

RICHARD GEORGE

(MSc Management Consultancy and Organisational Change, 2019)

Richard volunteers for Global Buddies, a programme supporting international students in their first term of study.

"As a proud alumnus of Birkbeck, the opportunity to share my experience and promote Birkbeck's community-centred values is one I do not take for granted. It is exciting to be able to encourage, uplift and inspire new students as they embark upon their Birkbeck journey."

Scan this QR code to find out more about how you could help Birkbeck's unique community or visit: campaign.bbk.ac.uk/get-involved



BIRKBECK AROUND THE WORLD



15 Cities

280+ Alumni Attendees

Commemorating centuries of lifelong learning **2**

As part of global community **1**

"I found it moving and interesting to meet all these different alumni living away from London, to reconnect and share memories of our time at the College. We can't wait to meet again!" *Anastasia Mandeki, MSc Organisational Psychology (2022), Athens Alumni Event Participant*

"It was wonderful to meet alumni with a similar understanding and appreciation for education, and together we enjoyed an evening of great conversations and new connections!" *Katja Stark, MA Arts Policy and Management (2011), Berlin Alumni Event Participant*

"It was such a pleasure meeting our alumni in Athens and to discover just how engaged they remain with our community. They had studied a wide variety of subjects but were united in their affection (even love!) of Birkbeck." *Joanna Bourke, Professor Emerita of History at Birkbeck*

This year, we will be hosting more alumni events and could be coming to a city near you. Look out for more details in our monthly alumni newsletter.

Update your details to ensure you are on the mailing list: www.bbk.ac.uk/forms/alumni/update



MAKING BREAKTHROUGHS IN AUTISM RESEARCH

New research by Professor Emily Jones, Dr Anna Gui and Dr Emma Meaburn indicates how genetic differences can affect how young children's brains respond to their social environment.

Approximately 1% of people in the UK have autism, a heritable neurodevelopmental condition that affects how they interact with others, communicate and experience the world. For many years, scientists have known that there are both genetic and environmental factors that contribute to autism. Scientists have also identified some of the types of genetic differences that relate to autism.

In a recent study, Birkbeck scientists discovered that young children with more of the genetic differences related to autism responded differently to faces at the neurological level. Their brains reacted differently to seeing human faces compared to those with fewer of these differences, at a stage before the usual signs of autism are noticeable.

The findings are important, explains Professor Jones, "because understanding the ways in which genetic factors affect brain development and contribute to traits associated with autism may

eventually help us identify ways in which to better support children with autism, from an earlier stage."

"Our research is a first step towards understanding whether differences in how we make sense of the social world partly relates to our DNA," she adds. "More research and interaction with the autistic community is needed to see whether these findings could contribute to an improved quality of life for some children and their families. It is also important to clarify that the genetic differences we are looking at are very common and cannot be used as a genetic test for autism."

The research team are now looking at how genetic differences between infants relate to behavioural development. Early results suggest that while the effects are small, DNA differences that are associated with autism are also related to the development of a child's social and adaptive skills.

Ultimately, the team hope their research continues to provide fresh perspectives on the development of this complex condition and contributes to support that will enrich the experiences of children with autism.



BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE REST OF THE WORLD

After completing a PhD in English and Comparative Literature at Birkbeck in 2019, Dr Sasha Dovzyhk now works for the Ukrainian Institute London (UIL) to curate and platform emerging artists and thought leaders.

Dr Dovzyhk was born three years before the collapse of the Soviet Union in Zaporizhzhia, a city on the Dnipro River in southeastern Ukraine. She believes that where she is from will always define her work and that it did so long before Russia launched its full-scale war there in 2022.

Though her research at Birkbeck focused on English author and artist Aubrey Beardsley, Dr Dovzyhk has now turned her attention towards literature and culture from Ukraine. She is determined to showcase the best talent and most topical conversations coming out of her home country.

"Ukraine has been absent from people's mental maps for a very long time. When it has been present, it's often been defined by Russian imperialist narratives. Now two years into full-scale war, it turns out Ukrainians are defiant. It turns out their defiance has a history of which the world knows nothing. Ukraine has a truly unique perspective that should be heard," she says.

"It turns out Ukrainians are defiant. It turns out their defiance has a history of which the world knows nothing."

In her role as special projects curator for the UIL, Dr Dovzyhk can now amplify this perspective and connect Ukrainian writing and culture to people from all over the world.

She recently organised an international writing project called the Ukraine Lab. It offered budding creatives the chance to join a writing residency and examine global challenges through a Ukrainian lens. "Selected writers were able to learn from world-leading experts on the environmental impact of the Chernobyl disaster, the Kremlin's digital disinformation campaigns, and how

Ukraine sparked the collapse of the Soviet Union and stood up to its successor," explains Dr Dovzyhk.

However, the in-person residency was moved online in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion. "It became a crucial platform for these authors based in Ukraine and the UK, and it supported them to come together to learn and collaborate. The works of creative nonfiction that emerged were fantastic." Dr Dovzyhk draws particular attention to Sofia Cheliak's 'Ukrainian Lottery', which looks at the surprising Ukrainians who reject the ready-made label of 'victimhood' and resist the enemy with a sense of humour and purpose.

In September 2023, Ibidem Press published a book compiling the different works that came out of Ukraine Lab. This also featured photography by Mstyslav Chernov, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer from Ukraine. Dr Dovzyhk explains with pride how the projects from Ukraine Lab have continued to "evolve and live beyond the initial residency."

Dr Dovzyhk also edits the London Ukrainian Review, an open-source journal hosted by the UIL that covers a range of topics through essays, poetry, short fiction and visual art: "While at Birkbeck, I was inspired by their commitment to making academic content open, free and accessible to all. Working with Birkbeck's Centre for Nineteenth-Century Studies and their open access journal were formative experiences.

"I'm now taking the same approach with the London Ukrainian Review. I want to bring the diversity of Ukrainian perspectives and experiences to new audiences."

Where many people in the UK and beyond had little idea of Ukraine's cultural significance in the world before the full-scale invasion, now there is a steady and vital interest in the nation and its defiant people. "The interest has come for all the wrong reasons and at such a great cost. But the truth is that Ukraine has been at the forefront of many fights that the world is facing today, from environmental challenges to global security.

Looking at Ukrainian writing and culture can teach us about cultural narratives and how patterns of resistance can emerge."



THEATRE AS RESISTANCE IN UKRAINE

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Dr Molly Flynn is a researcher and senior lecturer specialising in documentary theatre. She has been working with Ukrainian theatre-makers since 2015 to examine how performance has been used as a voice for resistance and unity.
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Ukrainian theatre-makers revolutionised their country's culture of performance after the Maidan Revolution in 2013-14, where deadly clashes in the streets of Kyiv culminated in the ousting of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych.

In 2015, Dr Molly Flynn travelled to Ukraine for a research project working with the newly created Theatre of Displaced People, a company showcasing real stories from the frontlines of the conflict.

The Ukrainian documentary theatre scene, she discovered, was a hotbed of innovation and a departure from the polished theatrics often seen in the same genre in the UK. They had developed to provide a platform for genuine, unfiltered narratives from real people to tell their stories without any added flourishes.

One project, titled 'Class Act', saw young people from different parts of the country coming together to share their experiences in different languages. The goal of this was to help bring communities together to dispel harmful stereotypes and narratives about Ukrainian division or cultural inferiority. Dr Flynn's research demonstrated the importance of documentary theatre in Ukraine as a form of anti-colonial resistance, contributing to the country's remarkable defiance and resilience in the face of Russian aggression.

"I could see that the theatre-makers there were working on a level of artistic engagement and community building that I hadn't seen before. The ways their aesthetic and artistic interests fed into the very heart of the political purpose of their activities was really inspiring to me."

In 2019, Dr Flynn and Dr Uilleam Blacker (UCL) organised a symposium called 'Depicting Donbas'. It brought together a cross-disciplinary group of Ukrainian artists, academics, and creatives to examine the role of art during times of conflict.

"It felt like a landmark event for me, because it provided an opportunity to dissect the purpose of creative representations of war and how they can be used with purpose."

As the conflict escalated with the full-scale invasion in 2022, Dr Flynn's commitment to Ukraine's theatre scene deepened. "In those early months, like many people, I tried to figure out what I could do to help and what resources were available to me that I could allocate in that direction. I realised that my contribution could be helping to provide a voice for Ukrainian art and experience."

She began by initiating 'Women in War', a public engagement project that commissioned two short documentary plays by Ukrainian playwrights Anastasiia Kosodii and Kateryna Penkova. The plays were written and translated in 2022, and had staged readings in London and Oxford, which were followed by audience discussion of the themes presented.

"I believe one of the things we need most in today's world is for people to feel heard, and to listen to each other. When theatre is serving a purpose, it has an incredible capacity to bring people into a shared space and to enter a meaningful dialogue with others.

"It can offer a space where people can empathise, collaborate and understand their own individual responsibilities within the broader context of society."

To capture her research journey from the revolution in 2014 to the invasion in 2022, Dr Flynn has curated an anthology of Ukrainian plays and translations called *Ukrainian New Drama after the Euromaidan Revolution*. The collection, published by Bloomsbury last year, is a meticulous documentation of the innovative theatre work that emerged from that period.

"I came to understand that playwriting can be a tool of cultural reclamation," she says. "The plays are testaments to the resilience of Ukrainian culture. They capture the essence of how theatre plays a crucial role in shaping Ukraine's cultural narrative and resistance."

A LEGACY THAT ENDURES



"Getting funding for my doctorate brought me to exactly where I needed to be," says Dr Željka Oparnica, who recently completed her PhD in History at Birkbeck. "I wanted to exchange ideas with historians and scholars from different disciplines. I wanted to be inspired and challenged every day, and to challenge the perceptions of others. Birkbeck made all that possible."

Dr Oparnica received the Margery Boughton Studentship in 2017, which covered her doctoral student fees and some living costs. Margery Boughton graduated from Birkbeck in 1955 and went on to become a prominent academic. With a gift in her will, Margery chose to support talented future students at Birkbeck.

"Getting this award was great motivation to pursue my research. I would like to thank Miss Boughton and others who have given to Birkbeck. Supporting students and research is one of the most impactful legacies you can leave behind. I hope that one day I can support a similar cause."

YOUR LEGACY AT BIRKBECK

"Studying here is easily the most significant thing I've done in my life," says Paris Jefferson (Politics, Philosophy and History, 2012), an accomplished actress, photographer and screenwriter.

It was at the University that Paris found the opportunity to merge her creative and intellectual worlds and challenge herself in a new way.

Driven by the transformative impact of her experience, and her desire to share this with future generations, Paris decided to pledge a generous gift to the University in her will:

"It will be used to transform the lives of those that might have never imagined they could study at Birkbeck. Never underestimate the influence your contribution can have."

Gifts like this empower the dreamers, thinkers and leaders of the future.

To explore how leaving a gift in your will can make a difference, contact our Regular Giving Officer Rebecca White at rebecca.white@bbk.ac.uk or on 020 3926 3240.



THE LIFELONG LEARNING GUARANTEE

In 2023, to mark 200 years since Birkbeck was founded, the University launched the Lifelong Learning Guarantee. This entitles all our alumni to a discount of up to 20% on the tuition fee cost of further study at Birkbeck, from short courses to PhDs.

Lifelong learning is in Birkbeck's DNA. This discount is our commitment that the University will continue to be open to you wherever you are in your learning journey.

As the nature of the workforce changes and new technologies and challenges arise, developing your skills and continuing to learn is more important than ever. But as Law alumna Gilane Tawadros says on page 15: "It is essential that people can also pursue education without a direct end goal, but as a way of developing their critical thinking, depth of understanding and sense of the world."

Whether you are wishing to upskill, retrain or learn something new, Birkbeck will have something for you.

Below are just some examples of the many courses on offer:

- Climate Change
- Environment and Sustainability
- Creative Writing
- Law (GDL)
- Digital Media Design
- History of Art
- Public Policy and Management
- Psychodynamic Counselling
- Business Analytics
- Human Resource Management

"We need institutions like Birkbeck because not everyone is ready for higher education in their teenage years. Learning is a lifelong project. I left school at 16 with no qualifications and here I am now, Dr Jeff! That's what Birkbeck does."

Dr Jeffrey Porter, a former tube driver who studied both his Master's and PhD in History at Birkbeck.

Find out more about the discounts available: www.bbk.ac.uk/prospective/lifelong-learning



THE LAST WORD



2023

WHAT A YEAR FOR BIRKBECK!

It was an honour to be the University's Chair of Governors during our 200th Anniversary as we commemorated all that Birkbeck stands for.

I believe George Birkbeck and the other founders would still recognise what we are trying to do and the values we embody. I think they would be proud of the impact we have had on our students, the world of higher education and society at large.

Our 200th Anniversary Foundation Day Dinner at Mansion House, in the presence of the Princess Royal and the Lord Mayor of London, was the culmination of those commemorations.

I am glad we could share the occasion with the wider Birkbeck community and join them in thanking former Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Latchman, as he stepped down after 21 years at the helm.

Thousands in our alumni community engaged with Birkbeck's 200th Anniversary activities and

continue to support our students as mentors, advocates and donors. This is a testament of how much this community want to pass on that special Birkbeck experience to the next generation.

As we start this next century, some things will stay the same, but there are some major challenges. We will face up to them and come out stronger, while remaining faithful to our perpetual mission, as we always have in the past 200 years.

Strong visionary leadership has always been a key ingredient of our enduring success. I am confident that our new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sally Wheeler, who began her tenure on 1 January this year, will drive forward the change needed to secure our future and continue to deliver on our core mission.

My fellow governors and I thank all the staff, students, alumni, fellows and friends for the energy and support you give back to Birkbeck. This makes the University the special place it is.

Sir Andrew Cahn
Birkbeck Chair of Governors

VOLUNTEER AT BIRKBECK

MENTORING

Join our flagship Mentoring Pathways programme and mentor a current student as they consider their career plans.

MENTORING
Pathways 

GLOBAL BUDDIES

Through the Global Buddies scheme, help an international student settle into London life and their studies at Birkbeck.

GLOBAL
Buddies 

CAREERS CLINICS

Provide careers insight in a one-to-one or group setting to help improve students' job applications and interview skills.

CAREERS
Clinics 

Scan this QR code to find out more about how you could help Birkbeck's unique community: campaign.bbk.ac.uk/get-involved



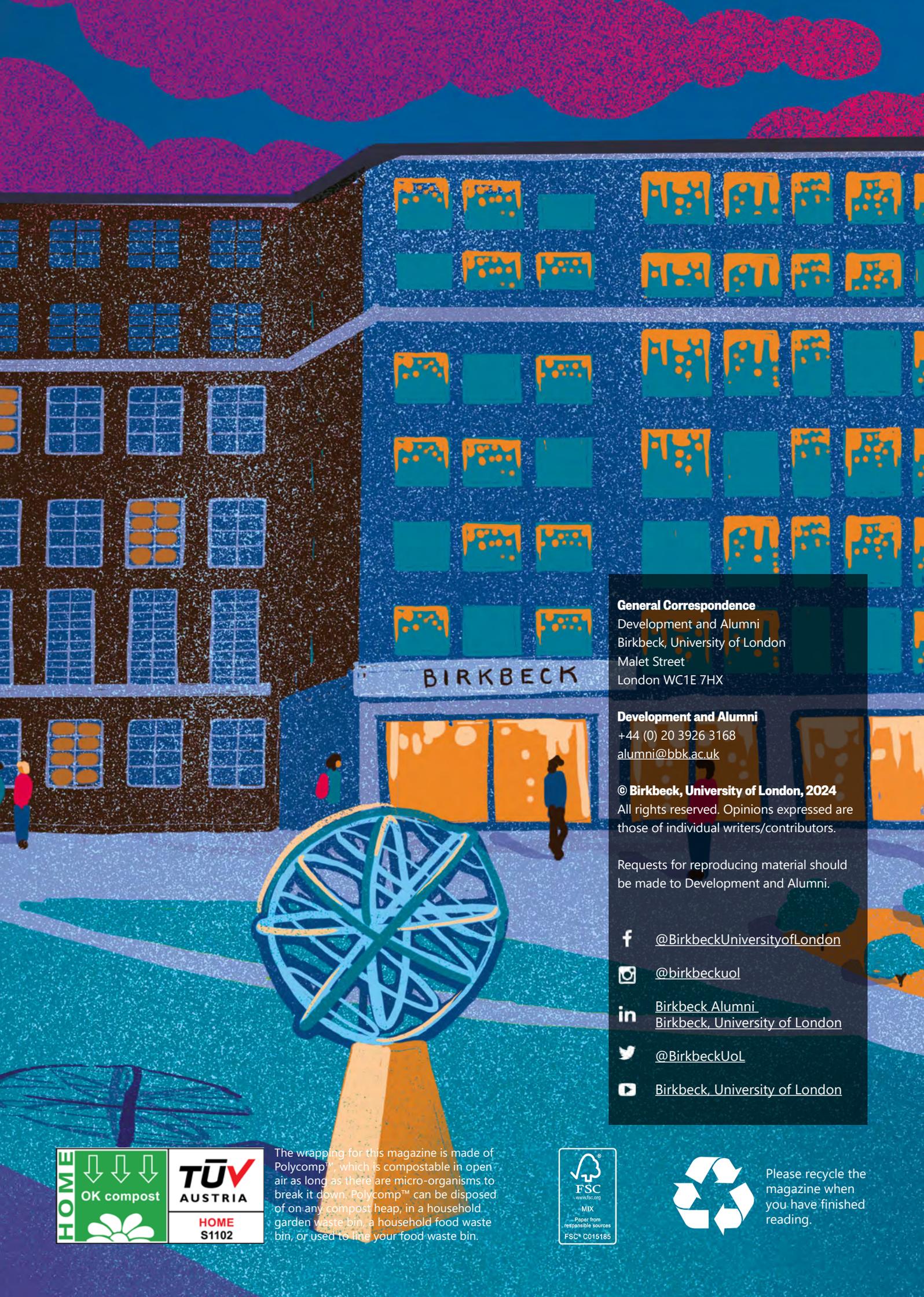
STAY CONNECTED – JOIN OUR ALUMNILINKEDIN GROUP

This is the official group for alumni of Birkbeck, University of London. Here you can contribute to, and stay in touch with, the growing Birkbeck alumni community. Find out about upcoming events, initiatives and volunteering programmes. Share relevant work and volunteering opportunities with the wider alumni network.



SCAN ME

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