

ALUMNI AND FRIENDS // AUTUMN 2017

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University of  
BRISTOL

## **Brexit**

The University challenge

## **Migration matters**

The truth behind migration

## **Timothy West**

Letter to my student self

# Contents

## Features

'O Captain! My Captain!'	6
Brexit: The university challenge	10
Migration matters	14
A world of good	18
Timothy West: Letter to my student self	20
The whole picture of your health	22

## News

Latest from Bristol	2
In pictures	4

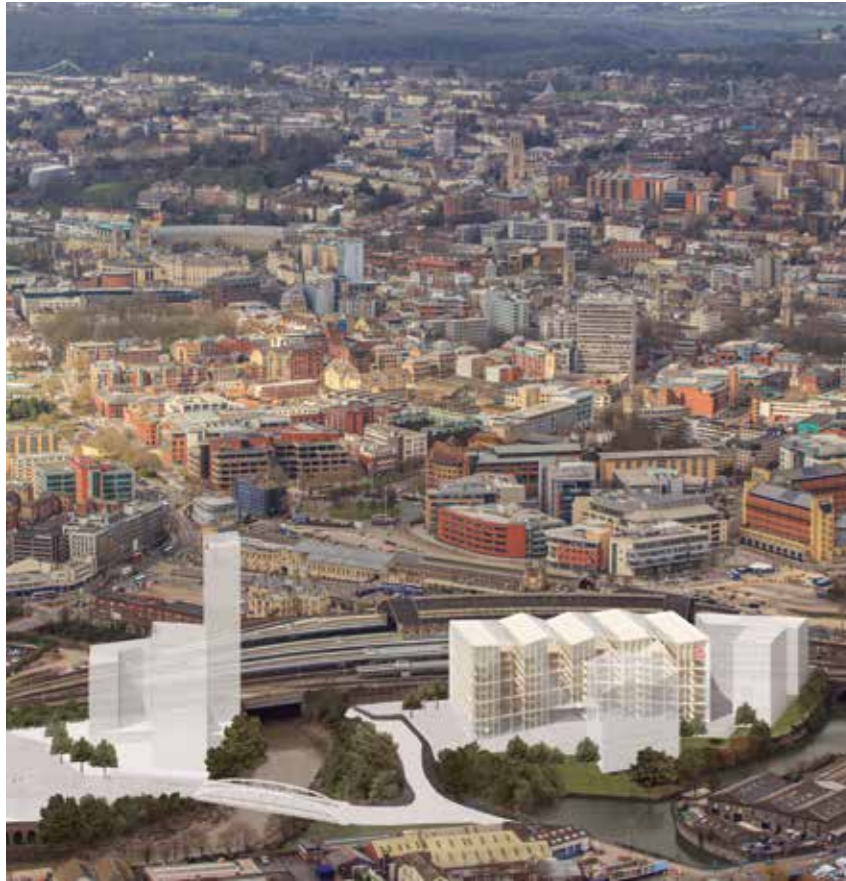
## Listings

In memoriam	26
Events	28



### Migration matters

Bristol's new Migration Studies Institute takes a fresh look at migration and its impact upon our lives.



University

## Landmark £10 million for Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus

The University of Bristol has received its largest ever philanthropic gift to support the creation of its additional campus in the heart of the city.

The £10 million gift is being made by Bristol alumnus Hugh Sloane and the Sloane Robinson Foundation, which he founded with his business partner George Robinson. It will help fund the University's transformational new Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus (TQEC), which is set to be part of one of the city's most significant regeneration projects in recent history.

Teaching and research on the seven-acre site, which adjoins Brunel's iconic Temple Meads train station, will focus on digital technologies, their application by citizens, organisations and industry, and the innovation they drive. Rigorous new degree programmes will be designed

and developed in collaboration with industry and partner organisations, to ensure students educated at TQEC are equipped with the knowledge, skills, values and resilience to thrive and lead in our rapidly changing world.

Professor Hugh Brady, Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Bristol said: 'I am delighted by the ambition and generosity Hugh Sloane and George Robinson have shown our University. This gift is an historic moment for our University, clearly demonstrating the benefits of working in partnership with visionary philanthropists, and it is my hope that this gift will be the first of many.'



Students

### Empowering the next generation

After achieving two A grades and a B in his A-levels, Beranger Igiraneza, who came from East Africa in 2002 as a refugee, will study Medicine at Bristol thanks to the new Bristol Scholars scheme.

Bristol Scholars is the first initiative of its kind in the UK that ensures local school pupils have an equal opportunity to realise their academic potential, irrespective of their background or circumstances. Thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends, 41 talented students will begin their life-changing Bristol education this year.



Alumni

### Alumni changing the world

From DBEs to CBEs, twenty-two alumni were recognised in the Queen's birthday honours list this year.

Among the twenty-two alumni listed for their outstanding achievements and service were the actor and author David Walliams (BA 1992) for his services to charity and the Arts, and Alison Munro (BSc 1975), Managing Director at Phase 2, HS2 Ltd for her services to the Rail Industry.



Research

### Scientists mass produce artificial blood

A breakthrough discovery at Bristol now offers hope that we could one day mass produce blood, particularly for patients with rare blood types.

New research offers hope that could revolutionise the blood transfusion process. Researchers from Bristol and NHS Blood and Transplant were able to manufacture red blood cells on a more efficient scale than before by developing a technique that allows the production of immortalised erythroid cell lines from adult stem cells.

University

## In the top 6% of universities in Europe

Earlier this year, the University of Bristol was ranked 22nd out of almost 400 universities in Europe.

The Times Higher Education (THE) looked at previously unpublished data drawn from thirteen separate performance indicators that make up its World University Rankings 2016/17, in which Bristol was ranked 71st globally and 9th in the UK. It is the only international performance table to judge world-class universities across all their core missions – teaching, research, knowledge transfer and international outlook.



Research

### Sight saving

Bristol researcher Dr Shelby Temple was named Innovator of the Year 2017 for his ground-breaking work developing a novel ophthalmic device that could prevent vision loss worldwide.

In the UK alone, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) affects more than 600,000 people and is estimated to cost the healthcare system £1.6 billion annually. Dr Temple has developed a device that can rapidly screen people at increased risk. The innovation arose from research looking at the ability of octopuses, cuttlefish and coral reef fish to see polarised light – an aspect of light that humans aren't typically aware they can see. The ability to perceive polarised light can be an early indicator of disease.



In brief

.....  
**Steve Lindsey** (BSc 1994), CEO of Lontra UK, was the only nominee from Great Britain for the European Inventor Award.  
.....

.....  
**Dr Eric Albone MBE**, Co-founder and Director of the Clifton Scientific Trust, was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays by the government of Japan.  
.....

.....  
Earlier this year, **Goh Siu Lin** (LLB 1993) became the first female to win the chairman post in the Kuala Lumpur Bar committee. Goh, who was already serving as the KL Bar honorary secretary, had pledged to ensure that her committee members are multiracial, multireligious, coming from both genders and of varying seniority.  
.....

.....  
British actress **Pearl Mackie** (BA 2008) became the latest *Doctor Who* assistant, Bill Potts, in Series 10 which aired earlier this year.  
.....

.....  
**Paul Lindley** (BSc 1989), founder and chairman of the organic baby food brand Ella's Kitchen, won International Director of the Year and Director of the Year at the Institute of Directors Awards 2017.  
.....

News

University

**1 Taking to the skies**

The University's new hot air balloon took to the skies this summer with our BUHABS student society and was part of the largest Balloon Fiesta in Europe.

University

**2 A celestial ceremony**

With Great George tolling, poetry and a large moon in the Great Hall, Nobel Prize-winning scientist Sir Paul Nurse officially became the University's new Chancellor.

Students

**3 Do you have what it takes?**

Out of thousands of applicants, Bristol PhD student Tim Gregory was one of twelve exceptional candidates who made the cut for a brand-new BBC TV show to find out who has what it takes to be an astronaut.

Bristol

**4 City of cool**

*Rough Guides* hailed Bristol as the coolest city in Britain, and it's easy to see why. This summer, the University sponsored a piano as part of the world-famous Play Me, I'm Yours piano project.

Alumni

**5 Grandmother proves it's never too late**

At 86, Peggy Styles became the oldest person to graduate with a doctorate from the University despite suspending her studies due to a life-threatening condition and having left school at 15 years old.

Alumni

**6 Recycled life jackets**

Seven per cent of deaths in Africa can be attributed to accidental drowning – so Vestability, an alumni start-up, has created an eco-friendly solution to the problem.

Research

**7 The right tools for the job**

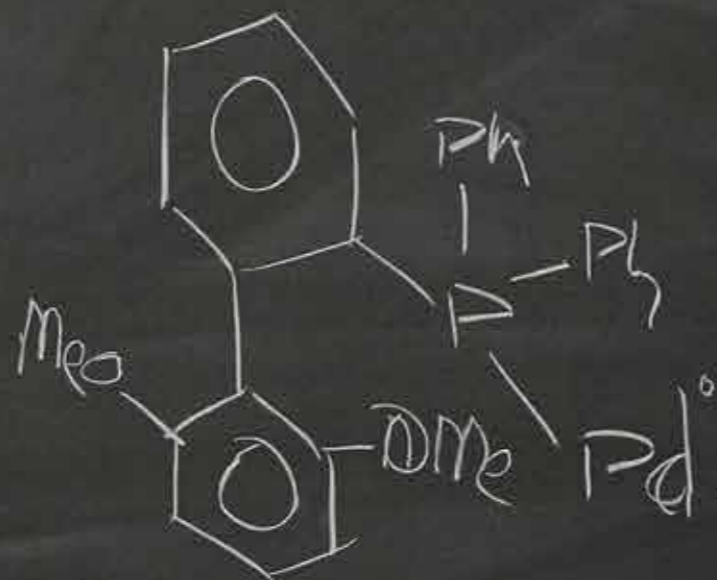
A team of researchers are developing 'wearable' robotic tools for surgery that will offer surgeons natural and dexterous movement as well as the ability to sense, see, control and safely navigate through surgical environments.



In the film *Dead Poets Society*, students leapt onto their desks to salute the English teacher that inspired them. Here at Bristol, we celebrate our lecturers who are changing lives in our Best of Bristol lecture series, and **Tom Corfield** (MEng 2009) speaks to *Nonesuch* about why he set it up seven years ago.

# 'O Captain! My Captain!'

Thank you



Mr Pinsent,  
Thank you for  
encouraging and  
believing in your  
students.

Helen Lewis (BSc 1983)

I still cherish  
my lectures from  
Professor Andy Nix  
They were the BEST

Yasin Elgabrun (MEng 2012)

Mike O'Mahony,  
your lectures  
were exceptional  
- inspirational  
and funny.

Olia K (BA 2006)

**W**hen I was at studying Engineering at Bristol I started sneaking into my friends' lectures to see what they were like. My first 'other' lecture outside my subject was about the history of art, which I knew nothing about. It was exciting because (weirdly) it was all relevant to the world around me. The lecturer encouraged us to get out and see art and architecture in the real world rather than just sitting in a lecture theatre looking at slides.

#### Sneaking into lectures

I started out with history of art and then branched out into theology, politics and medicine. My friends started out thinking I was a bit nutty for wanting to do 'non-compulsory' learning, but when they heard about all the other subjects they were always intrigued, particularly when there were broader insights that turned out to be relevant to their own subject. Invariably each lecture led me to think about new ideas, read an unexpected book or, at the very least, have a good conversation later in the pub with my friends.

### 'My friends started out thinking I was a bit nutty for wanting to do non-compulsory learning'

The lecturers didn't notice in large lectures, but one time a friend invited me to something that turned out to be a seminar. There were only about eight other people in the room and I was the only male participant in what turned out to be a seminar on gender politics! Wrong as that may be on so many levels... the lecturer welcomed me in and even humoured my (probably) daft questions at the end.

#### Turning an idea into reality

It struck me that everyone should get the chance to do this – to hear the most inspirational teaching from across the University, regardless of the subject you happened to study. In every subject there was a lecturer who in 30 minutes could inspire you to be interested in something for life. They were all amazing! That's where the idea for the Best of Bristol lectures started – as a student-voted showcase of the most inspirational teaching the University has to offer.

But then there was the question – how? An idea was one thing... doing it was quite another. But I was determined, and passionate to build it. I had an amazing teacher when I was in primary school. Every week we had a lesson that was just called 'technology' and he encouraged a room full of eight-year-olds to explore a cupboard full of old tools, bits of wood and broken things and try to make stuff out of it. He was the one who inspired me to become 'an inventor'.

I went on to study a new course called Engineering Design at Bristol because of that teacher. I had gained a lot of the skill and know-how needed to get the show running; I learnt to build websites so that I could set up a

digital campaign to show support for the idea. In the end over 1,000 students signed a petition to get the Best of Bristol lectures started and more than 1,500 voted on which lecturers should take part. The best thing in the first year was that an amazing group of students volunteered to help make it all happen. From organisation to branding, marketing, websites and film making, nothing would have happened without this awesome team of legends.

#### Broadening horizons

All the Best of Bristol lectures were great. What the best lecturers had in common was that they took the opportunity to talk about their own research, something that was maybe controversial or new, but in a way that everyone could engage with. They were all different and all unashamedly themselves. Often the lecturers with the most interesting dress sense ended up being the most intriguing speakers – such as English historian Ronald Hutton, who was wonderful.

For me being a student is about broadening your horizons and being inspired to learn about new things. Having a great teacher has always been the thing that's made me fall in love with a subject and want to understand it more. The best thing after the first year of the lectures was that there was a second year and a third year and more! Successive teams of brilliant students have made the Best of Bristol Lectures their own and it's been really exciting to see.

### 'For me being a student is about broadening your horizons and being inspired to learn about new things'

#### Never stop learning

After graduating, I got an award from the social enterprise start-up funders UnLtd to grow the Best of Bristol idea to universities across the UK. This got me into EdTech (education technology) start-ups, where I brought together my love of learning with my 'inventor' skills. I'm now Head of Product at Social Finance Digital Labs, where we develop 'Tech for Good' – apps that empower people to tackle complex social problems like homelessness. Bristol gave me so much, not to mention great friends and a drive to never stop learning. ●

For more alumni thank yous, or to share your own, please visit [bristol.ac.uk/nonesuch](http://bristol.ac.uk/nonesuch)

Professor Gary Foster  
always had highly  
entertaining lectures.  
I even share those now  
with my own students.

Lucy Winchcombe (BSc 2009)

Thank you Dr. Hill  
for teaching me  
that there is no  
such thing as failure.

Eva-Lucia Llewellyn (BSc 2009)

Dr Basil Cottle's  
sense of fun  
brought my  
subject to life.

Charlie Lambert (BA 1971)

**The EU referendum result sent shocks throughout the higher education sector and across the continent. But what does this mean for universities, and how can Bristol tackle the challenges and seize the opportunities? Four Bristol experts examine the uncertainty.**

# Brexit: The university challenge



## Katya Adler

(BA 1995, Hon LLD 2017)  
Broadcast journalist  
BBC Europe editor



they've gone through the stages of mourning in rapid succession: distress, anger, resentment, denial and now acceptance.

In the education sector – what happens to Erasmus? What happens to that wonderful ability to study in any university you want across the EU? Considering that most young people in the UK wanted to remain in the EU this is certainly worrying. While we in the UK seem to be in disarray, the rest of Europe is pretty sure Brexit is going to happen.

## How has Brexit changed European perceptions of the UK?

We don't realise how much we were appreciated in EU circles: for our civil service, our diplomatic experience and our ability to roll up our sleeves and get on with it! Elsewhere in Europe, it's very much about consensus politics with endless discussion and deliberation. The UK was always good at concentrating minds and galvanising brains to find solutions such as making the single market more competitive.

When the UK voted to leave there was dismay across the continent. EU politicians tell me in the 12 months since the referendum

**'It's easy to list the complications, but the fact is we did vote to leave. I truly believe the UK will be OK'**

However, I have yet to come across a European leader who doesn't wish with all their heart this wasn't the case. So I believe negotiators will find a way to somehow keep the Erasmus scheme in place.

It's easy to list the complications, but the fact is we did vote to leave. I truly believe the UK will be OK. There's a lot of talent here. As a nation, we're good at thinking outside the box. That will help us thrive in the long term. In the short term, it will be very complex.

## Professor Phil Syrpis

EU law expert  
Co-ordinated School  
of Law's Brexit  
response



## How are academics from the University of Bristol helping to negotiate Brexit?

One of the many unintended consequences of the referendum is that academics who have spent years teaching and researching EU law are suddenly very much in demand (and yes, I know it won't last). Almost all areas of our work are impacted. Brexit affects student mobility, recruitment and the curriculum we teach. It affects the research we undertake and the sources on which we rely to fund that research.

We are finding that our work has new audiences. It is of interest not only to our colleagues in academia, but to national and local politicians, trade unionists, citizens' advice

bureaux, community groups, pressure groups, employers, recruiters, business organisations and the citizenry at large. We are using blogs and a variety of media channels to disseminate our research, as well as workshops to bring these diverse communities together.

In the next few months, I will be contributing to the work of the House of Commons Library and the relevant Select Committees, scrutinising the government's proposed Brexit Bills and the progress of the Article 50 negotiations.

All too often, the role of academics has been restricted to ad hoc appearances before Select Committees, but there are signs that this might be changing. There seems to be an appetite within Parliament for new ways of engaging with academia.

The challenge is to ensure that academics are able to demonstrate their worth in this fast-moving, politically charged and, for many of us, unfamiliar context. We have to be confident about the skills and knowledge we possess, and learn to work with policy-makers in creative ways to deliver considered and robust policy outcomes.

If we fail to adapt and engage we will be left only to criticise the resulting policy, instead of helping to form it.

Watch Professor Syrpis discuss the triggering of Article 50 on our webpages at [bristol.ac.uk/nonesuch](http://bristol.ac.uk/nonesuch)

**'Almost all areas of our work are impacted'**



**Dr Nieves Perez-Solorzano Borragan**

Senior Lecturer in European Politics



**The interplay between the city and the University makes Bristol one of the world's great civic universities. But how will Brexit affect Bristol?**

Bristol voted to remain in the EU. Its business sector is diverse, and has been a huge asset. It includes world-leading expertise in low-carbon technology; aerospace and advanced engineering; innovation, creative and digital media; and financial and professional services. Bristol is home to the fastest-growing cluster of high-tech small and medium enterprises outside of London, and to SETSquared, crowned best university incubator in Europe three years running.

But Brexit has brought uncertainty, and businesses do not welcome uncertainty. There is a lack of detail and a perceived sidelining of business from any government and cross-party decision-making on Brexit. For example, 50 per cent of employees in the visual effects sector in Bristol are from the EU, and we no longer know whether, and under what conditions, EU citizens may be employed to work here. 66 per cent of Bristol's exports go to the EU, making it the third most dependent city in the UK on EU exports. But there's also a concern that a city with a long-standing international outlook may no longer be perceived as 'open for business' and be less able to attract and retain talent.

But faced with the challenges that the Brexit vote has unearthed, the city is living up to its motto of 'virtute et industria': the City Council set up a Bristol Brexit response group within days of the referendum to allow the city to respond to the Brexit vote, to be an active partner in the shaping of the negotiation process and to act locally to respond to the changes ahead.

The University of Bristol has been at the forefront of research and public engagement via the #BristolBrexit initiative which culminated with a public event that brought together academics and members of the public to discuss the city's response. Industry leaders will ensure that Bristol is regarded as 'open for business' to attract and retain talent. Bristol, like the UK, is a divided city. As a microcosm of the nation, how Bristol performs in a post-Brexit world will reflect the country's capacity to respond to the changes brought about by Brexit. ●

**In numbers**

**€73,791,443**

Funding University received from EU Horizon 2020 programme

**9,268**

Alumni in the EU

**66%**

Bristol exports to the EU



**Dr Erik Lithander**

Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Bristol



**Many of our staff and academics are from outside of the UK; how will this impact them?**

The challenges that Brexit poses to our international staff, European as well as non-European, go far beyond the technicalities of visas and work permits. Over decades, the UK has built a reputation as a welcoming and supportive environment for the world's leading researchers, and we as a nation (not least its economy) have benefited tremendously from their presence here.

Universities such as Bristol have had an international outlook since their inception. Our academics are driven to collaborate with their peers around the world, including Europe, in

their pursuit of excellence. There is no question that the European Union has been extremely effective in facilitating such collaboration through its various research framework programmes, and the free movement of people across European borders has made it more attractive still.

Even if a relatively straightforward work permit system for European academics is introduced, it sends a lukewarm signal to them. Essentially, we are making them beg to stay, when we should be thanking them for being here. There is no lack of opportunity elsewhere for talented and mobile academics, and there are plenty of ambitious and well-funded universities in North America, Australia, Asia and indeed Europe who will make tempting offers to our academic superstars if we don't look after them and make them feel welcome and appreciated here.

In terms of soft diplomacy and indirect influence, it is clear that the UK's privileged position as one of the world's leading centres of academic excellence is a strength on the global stage, not least in our interactions with Europe, and the government needs to realise this.

**'Universities such as Bristol have had an international outlook since their inception'**

*Above Before the EU referendum, the University of Bristol held a Question Time-style debate called 'The West decides: The EU referendum' with Dr Phil Syrpis, University of Bristol Law School as Chair*





An aerial photograph of a city map, likely Bristol, is the background. The map is a complex grid of streets and green spaces. Several people are standing on the map. In the center, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a black top with lace sleeves and a necklace, stands with her arms crossed. To her right, a man with glasses, wearing a dark suit jacket over a purple shirt, stands looking towards the camera. In the foreground, there are blurred figures of other people, including one in a blue shirt and another in a red shirt. The overall scene suggests a collaborative or research environment.

University

**Politics has a tendency to distort the facts, creating dividing lines between people and ideas in the interests of a single agenda. For Bristol's researchers, this presents a unifying challenge.**

# Migration matters



Previous image © Dave Pratt // Graffiti © Nick Smith

Above Graffiti in Stokes Croft, Bristol

One look at the news suggests that the rate and the challenges of human mobility are becoming increasingly pronounced.

More people are traversing geographical borders, leading to fears about the scarcity of resource and stark divisions in wealth, increasing suspicion and hostility towards those who find themselves seeking life elsewhere, whether by choice or circumstance.

The result has been a rise of anti-immigrant Republican attitudes in America, the resurgence of Far Right movements in the West, and growing anti-European sentiment in post-Brexit UK, as politicians capitalise on mounting levels of uncertainty.

Terminology that was originally created for the purposes of state administration – migrant, citizen, labourer, asylum seeker – has been absorbed into political and public discourse, damaging human relations and limiting our understanding.

### Reading between the lines

The reality is far more complex, as are the circumstances and experiences of the people behind the labels used to categorise, and often sideline them.

Despite what headlines suggest, the number of international migrants as a share of the world's population has remained the same in recent decades – a mere three per cent. There appear to be more people moving because the world's population is greater than ever before.

'For humans, to be alive is to constantly move through both time and space. Mobility is also, and has always been, an integral and essential part of humankind's economic, social, cultural and political life. Mobility is an irresistible fact of our existence and to be able to move freely is good. But in an unjust world, it's also an unearned and unequally distributed privilege', says Professor Julia

O'Connell Davidson, co-director of the new Bristol Institute for Migration and Mobility Studies (BIMMS), one of seven new Specialist Research Institutes that seek to strengthen Bristol's presence as an agenda-setting voice in some of today's most important conversations.

Professor O'Connell Davidson adds: 'It has always been the mobility of those who lack social and political power – slaves, servants, the poor, women, children – that has been controlled and restricted, and the reasons why are obvious: freedom to move allows the subordinate a chance to escape from domination, to evade control, or to subvert the social order. To control mobility is to control people and preserve a particular social – and global – order.'

## 'For humans, to be alive is to constantly move through both time and space'

BIMMS is home to cutting-edge research on many different aspects of the impact of those controls today – from the thousands of deaths they are currently leading to in the Mediterranean, through the assumptions about 'integration' that underpin new restrictions on spousal immigration, to the ways in which ordinary people forge lives and identities in the face of such controls. It is also at the forefront of research on historical and cultural dimensions of migration and mobility, bringing together academics from law and social sciences, and arts and humanities to address conceptual and theoretical issues as well as the experiential – the numbers and the people.

This interdisciplinary approach is relatively novel in the field of migration studies, where the lines of enquiry have tended to follow the patterns set by policy agendas – families have been studied separately to students, child migration as separate to labour movements, and the experience of poverty and inequality of 'citizens' as distinct from 'migrants'. Whereas the reality is that these categories are not necessarily an accurate reflection of people's lived experiences.

Such evidence-based insights into the patterns of human mobility across time and place are vital in challenging the prevalent and often pernicious narrative around migration. They also reveal a far more fascinating picture than the two-dimensional image of migration we have become used to.

There are social historians looking at colonialism, the British Empire and its relations with China and India; English researchers exploring literary representations of race in Black British and African American writing over the past four decades; lawyers studying questions of citizenship and deprivation; musical historians investigating the displacement of European musicians during the 20th century and the relevance of music in diasporic communities; sociologists looking at the anthropology of migration and cross-cultural marriage; arts scholars researching the interplay of nationalism and medieval poetry; and epidemiologists looking at the health impacts of migration.

As BIMMS co-director Professor Chris Bertram points out: 'The breadth of work across BIMMS reflects the complexity of the issue of migration.'

### Seeing beyond borders

The University recently welcomed one of the world's leading experts on migration and citizenship, Professor Bridget Anderson.

A new appointment to BIMMS, Professor Anderson is a prominent voice in the argument for an academic, public and political perspective that sees beyond the divisive notions of 'us' and 'them'. Her work, like that of many of Bristol's researchers, shows that a deeper understanding about why, where and how many people move could usefully dismantle the artificial borders that separate us.

Coming from her previous role as Research Director of the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), Professor Anderson brings with her a wealth of invaluable experience from working with migrants' organisations, trades unions and legal practitioners at the local, national and international level.

Researchers attached to both Bristol's Law School and BIMMS are similarly using their expertise and profile to call for a more rounded view of migration.

Recently a group of academics, including Professor Bertram, spoke out against the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the minimum income immigration rule, which stipulates that British people must earn more than £18,600 before they can apply for spouses or partners from non-EEA states to join them.

However, the Supreme Court did decide that the Government had been unduly restrictive in only counting the British partner's earnings when assessing a family's capacity to support itself and that it had not done enough to take account of the best interests of children when implementing the rules.

Responding to the outcome, Professor Bertram noted that ultimately, as a political matter 'it is for the country to decide what kind of family migration regime it wants. Recently, the interests of taxpayers, businesses and groups concerned about immigration levels have been a powerful influence of policy. If we aspire to be a liberal society, the interests of citizens in pursuing relationships and forming families with the partner of their choice need to be given due weight.'

### Making a difference

Bristol has always prided itself on cultivating a spirit of internationalisation, with a long history of fostering strategic relationships between educational institutes, research collaborations and industry partners.

Academics are also involved as key advisors to international bodies such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the European Union. Much of BIMMS' work also involves collaborative projects with prominent organisations such as the City of Sanctuary, Bristol Refugee Rights and the Bristol Somali Forum.

'I hope that we'll have some impact on policy and on public debate,' adds Professor Bertram. 'That's a slightly double-edged sword because there's always a danger that the policy makers end up hearing only what they want to hear, which is why it's important that we maintain a focus on the facts and the principles.' ●



## Sanctuary Scholarships

In 2016, the University introduced the Sanctuary Scholarship scheme to offer support for those from refugee and asylum-seeking communities to study at Bristol. Professor Hugh Brady, Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Bristol, said: 'We know there are factors that make it difficult for people from refugee and asylum-seeking communities to apply to university. Their previous studies may have been interrupted, they might not have evidence of their previous qualifications or their qualifications are not transferable. Our scheme has been designed to accommodate these factors and encourage them to apply.'

**There are two scholarships schemes – a full scholarship, and a partial scholarship for students who can access UK Government support. To find out more, or to make a donation to the Sanctuary Scholarship scheme visit: [bristol.ac.uk/alumni/sanctuary](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni/sanctuary)**

# A world of good

**Alumnus John Knowlson believed in the transformative impact of travel so much so that he left a legacy to the University to provide students with that opportunity. Over fifty years later, the Knowlson Trust award is still changing the lives of students like Sarah Munro (MSci 2015-).**

**M**y month-long trip to the Cusuco National Park in Honduras, Central America was priceless. With Operation Wallacea, an organisation that conducts biodiversity surveys around the world, I helped to collate data from surveys of the park for their funding application. The work they do is so important. Cusuco is rated in the top 100 most irreplaceable forest sites and the 25th most important site in the world for the protection of amphibians.

Habitat surveys were the most challenging; these involved measuring the type and number of trees as well as habitat data such as canopy openness, soil depth and leaf-litter depth throughout a sample site. That sounds pretty straightforward, right? Add to that though the fact that many of the sample sites were basically cliff faces in mountainous cloud forest! I loved habitat surveys as everyone worked as a team to pull each other up the steepest parts, and yell warnings: 'Watch out for that ants' nest!'

Cortecito was the most beautiful camp, enveloped by forest and cloaked by an ever-changing chorus of toucans, toucanets and howler monkeys over the sound of the river bubbling away. It was so peaceful, it felt like home. This was one of the best places to see birds; I saw my first toucans, green honeycreepers and barred antshrikes while

sitting on a felled ancient tree. It was so unexpectedly beautiful, not like the desolate propaganda of deforestation that everyone my age has grown up with.

We stayed with different families in the village who didn't speak English. I had great fun teaching a local doctor how to play the card game 'Cheat' in Spanish ('Tramoso!') using a well-used phrasebook and a lot of miming! A proud moment for me was being able to ask someone how to make refried beans and then understanding the answer! It's encouraged me to continue learning Spanish.

I am so grateful for the Knowlson Trust award. Moving back to the UK from abroad a few years ago coincided with the most stressful school year, which triggered a bad year for me; I slipped into an eating disorder and came out the other side but I still wasn't who I used to be. Everything about this trip – the people, the teamwork, the difficult trekking, a new country, language and culture and living in the beautiful wild forest – brought me back to who I was before the worst year of my life. ●

**Bristol's past achievements, and those we hope to celebrate in the future, have been made possible thanks to the legacies of our generous alumni and friends through scholarship programmes and the Alumni Foundation. For more information please visit [bristol.ac.uk/alumni/legacy](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni/legacy)**





## Alumni

**Timothy West, often referred to as the godfather of British drama, has played more than 250 characters on stage and screen, from our previous Chancellor Sir Winston Churchill to Stan in EastEnders, and was recently awarded an honorary degree. In this letter to himself, we find out about the pivotal moments of his life and how Bristol came to shape the person he is today.**

# Timothy West's Letter to my student self

### Dear Timothy,

I know you want to carve out your own way, but if your idea of fun when you were a child was to skip school and pretend to be Brunel on Bristol's docks, then you shouldn't resist acting so much. Don't listen to Mother and Father – I know they had a hard life in the theatre, but it's in your blood. And nothing worth working at, comes easily.

Take the risk.

But I know how stubborn you are. You'll think you can do both. But you're here now, so get yourself stuck into the amateur dramatic society and student newspaper. It will be a shock working with girls for the first time, but a wonderful one.

And when you go back to Bristol to take part in the first ever National Student Drama Festival set up by the *Sunday Times* – be ready. It will change your life. Make sure you time your trip to the loo perfectly because the Chairman of Judges, Harold Hobson, has something he needs to say to you.

Don't forget to try lots and lots of different things because you won't really find out what you're best at until you do it (and that is not being an Office Furniture Salesman – trust me, you will be terrible at it). Experiment, and don't be afraid to do what you love. Grab hold of the opportunities that come to you, even if they scare you. Have confidence in yourself.

Thank the people who inspired you. Now. You may not realise it, but they shaped who you are and what you love. Tell Mr (Sammy) Cowtan how he made Shakespeare come alive in class. You'll be teaching his methods in years to come. Because by the time you realise how much they did for you, it may be too late for them.

And I know you don't have much money, but get out and see the world, because it will most definitely change yours.

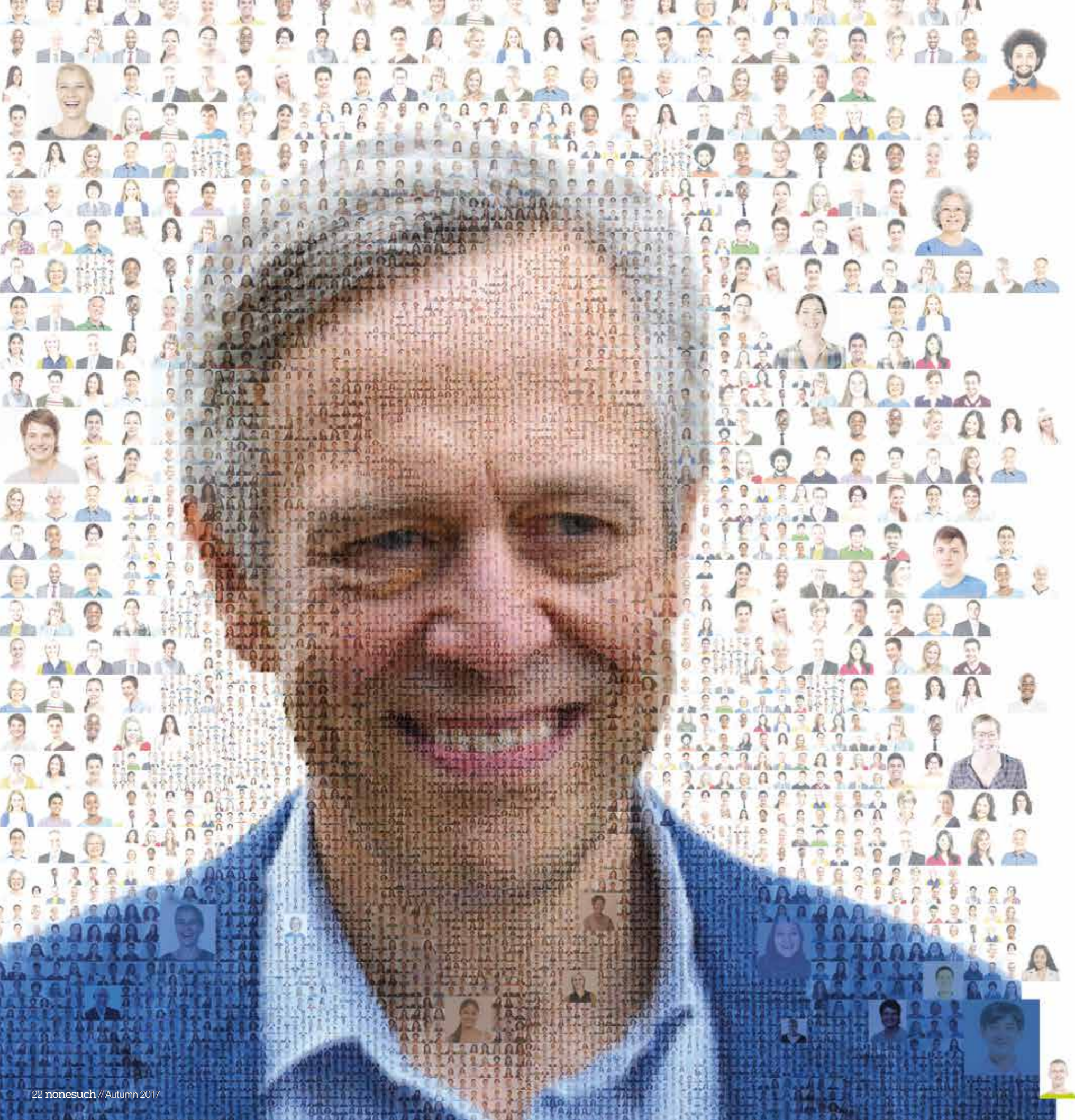
Good luck!

From Future-Timothy

PS: Watch out for that Julian Glover kid from Lower 2B... ●

Timothy West, Bristol Old Vic, 1972. © Photographer Derek Balmer, courtesy University of Bristol Theatre Collection

You can find out more about Timothy's time at Bristol and his honorary degree by reading his interview online at [bristol.ac.uk/alumni/nonesuch](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni/nonesuch)



## Research

**With conflicting public messages about aspects of our health today, it is a real challenge to know which advice to follow. At Bristol, population health scientists are developing a ground-breaking health study method that will disentangle cause from effect, and help us to answer some of the world's most pressing health questions.**

# The whole picture of your health

Twenty-one years ago, over 14,000 pregnant mothers agreed to share one of the most personal and life-changing experiences of their lives – for science. Through years of questionnaires, blood samples, DNA tests and more, they gave the *Children of the 90s* epidemiology study an unprecedented bank of information. The scale and depth of the study makes it unique across the world. It has been the source of countless discoveries. We now know it is safer for babies to sleep on their back; that 15 minutes of vigorous exercise a day can reduce the risk of obesity by half; and that teenage girls who are too thin may be putting their bones at risk later on in life.

Bristol's population health research has revolutionised the way we live, but the *Children of the 90s* study is just the beginning. This study took place on a vast scale, over several decades, yet very few research projects can replicate the time or resources. As a result, we often hear about a new study that claims to have the answer to the latest health advice, even if it is less reliable than the work which has been done before.

The challenge is to conduct a study with the depth and scale of *Children of the 90s*, but

quicker and on a lower budget – and Bristol researchers have a solution. They are building an unprecedented genetic database called MR-Base. Using a principle called Mendelian randomisation, this bank of genetic information could transform the way in which we conduct health studies, leading to more robust and reliable health advice.

### Is our health advice reliable?

'New study suggests light drinking is healthy during pregnancy' – does this sound familiar? These sorts of headlines are commonplace now. They claim to hold new information on a range of health issues, and capture the attention of anyone affected. Expectant mothers in the UK recently faced headlines both for and against light drinking during pregnancy. Some studies suggested light drinking could help the unborn do better in school, while one newspaper was even so bold as to print the headline 'Pregnant women told to ignore drinking advice'. But which advice is it referring to? With similar conflicts in reporting on cancer, obesity, high blood pressure and other health issues, how do we know which advice to follow and which to ignore?

Illustration © Jacoey



Left Benefactor Dr Jonathan de Pass (MB CHB 1979) meets Professor George Davey Smith and Dr Susan Ring, Head of Laboratories and Executive Director ALSPAC, in the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences

‘Without knowing it, we have all been recruited into an experiment from the moment we were conceived’

**Misleading studies**

The problem with these studies is that they are observational: the researchers recorded a set of data for children of pregnant drinkers and another for children of pregnant non-drinkers, and looked for patterns in the results. However, this tells us nothing about cause and effect, and so rarely tells the whole story.

Professor George Davey Smith is a leading clinical epidemiologist working on the MR-Base project. He explains: ‘It’s likely that mothers who drink more during pregnancy will differ in many ways from mothers who don’t. In the studies that have been reported, the mothers who drank more frequently during pregnancy were likely to have higher

educational attainment, and healthier lifestyles.’ These social factors have the potential to affect the health, wellbeing and educational achievements of a child.

**Finding the truth**

The challenge is to conduct a study unaffected by these external factors – known as confounding risk factors. The best way of doing this is via a randomised control trial. This is a study where participants are randomly allocated into two groups, who will differ in no other way than the factor being studied. For example, to find out the effect of a new drug, one group may be administered the drug while the other is administered a placebo. This method makes it far more likely that any observed differences have been caused by the drug.

So why doesn’t everyone conduct this sort of study? ‘This is a great method,’ says Davey Smith, ‘but it’s very expensive, and in many situations you simply couldn’t do this for logistical or ethical reasons. You couldn’t randomise pregnant women to drink more or drink less for example.’

However, there is an elegant solution – and it comes from genetics.

**Harnessing genetics**

Without knowing it, we have all been recruited into an experiment from the moment we were conceived. As the ‘father of modern genetics’ Gregor Mendel famously discovered, the genes we inherit from our parents – influencing everything from our appetites, to our sleep patterns, to our drinking habits – are essentially randomised. They are generally transmitted independently of environmental factors, such as social class or lifestyle.

Mendelian randomisation groups people together by their genetic code and compares the results. If we compare a set of people with a version of a gene associated with heavier drinking and another set of people with a version associated with lighter drinking, any differences are likely to be a result of the gene itself and not any other environmental factors.

Researchers use this method to interrogate a vast ‘library’ of people’s health and genetic data in MR-Base. They can analyse thousands of health characteristics, simply by splitting the library of people into groups based on which version of the related gene they have. They then observe the differences between these groups.

This can be used to produce clear, reliable answers on health causes and effects, such as the impacts of drinking more or less alcohol. In fact, it was shown in a 2012 genetic study using data from the *Children of the 90s* project that even moderate alcohol consumption during pregnancy was linked with children having a lower IQ.

Mendelian randomisation has also been used to debunk a number of other myths

surrounding alcohol intake, such as the idea that drinking a moderate amount might lower the risk of heart disease – in fact, alcohol has an adverse effect across the range of intake.

**Bristol’s role to play**

Bristol’s Population Health Science Institute is second-to-none. It’s one of seven pioneering Specialist Research Institutes that builds on the University’s world-leading reputation for population health research that addresses some of society’s greatest challenges. It seems fitting that as the *Children of the 90s* generation comes of age – many now with their own children to provide a new generation to the ongoing study – the field of population health at Bristol is celebrating something of a ‘coming of age’ as well. The founding of this Institute will provide projects such as MR-Base the opportunity to truly flourish. This will build a vast database of genetic associations which allows millions of potential causal relationships to be studied. By combining data from over one thousand genetic studies on diseases and other traits, the researchers have created a platform from which they can use Mendelian randomisation to predict health outcomes due to different factors.

Not only has this advance made it quick, cheap and easy to perform this analysis, but the output of each analysis should also be more reliable than using observational data alone. This will ultimately have a profound impact on both the treatments we can develop and on the reliability of the health advice we are given, perhaps even helping to restore trust in what we are told. ●

Mendelian randomisation in 2 minutes. Watch Professor George Davey Smith give a brief overview in this video at: [bris.ac.uk/alumni/mendelian-video](http://bris.ac.uk/alumni/mendelian-video)



**Reaching for new horizons**

Inspired by research at Bristol’s Population Health Science Institute, alumnus Dr Jonathan de Pass (MB ChB 1979) and his wife Georgina, recently gave £1 million to health research at Bristol.

They wish to inspire the next generation of leading researchers by funding a number of priority health research areas such as population health and Parkinson’s disease as well as Bristol’s Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

‘The solutions to many of the world’s problems are rooted in high-quality academic research in which Bristol, as a leading institution, has a distinguished record.’





## Calendar November 2017 to July 2018

Make sure you're invited to relevant events in your area by updating your details at [bristol.ac.uk/alumni/mydetails](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni/mydetails)

### NOVEMBER

Saturday 18 November  
**Officer Training Corps eighth annual dinner** // Bristol

Thursday 23 November  
**Badock Hall Association Lecture** // Bristol

Thursday 23 November  
**Bristol Law School Women's Network** // London

### DECEMBER

Thursday 7 December  
**Alumni Association Student Awards** // Bristol

Monday 11 December  
**London Branch Alumni Carol Service** // London

### JANUARY

Saturday 20 January  
**Midlands Branch annual lunch and AGM** // Solihull

### APRIL

Friday 13 April  
**Alumni Reception** // Shanghai

### JULY

Saturday 14 July  
**Alumni Reunion 2018** // Bristol  
If you are interested in gathering a group of your contemporaries to attend the reunion please contact [alumni-events@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:alumni-events@bristol.ac.uk) and we can help by forwarding your invitation to friends you may have lost contact with.



### Get involved

There are various ways to get involved with the University, including mentoring, acting as a speaker, giving careers advice and representing the alumni community. More information on alumni representation will be available on our website [bristol.ac.uk/alumni/volunteer](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni/volunteer) and through our regular e-newsletters, or please email us for more information at [alumni-volunteers@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:alumni-volunteers@bristol.ac.uk)



**Julie Goldstein (BSc 1978)**  
**Chair of Convocation and the Alumni Association**

July was a month of reunions, meetings and special celebrations. We welcomed over 450 alumni and guests back to Bristol for the annual Alumni Weekend, opening with a reception at the Life Sciences building and an update on the University developments from our Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Hugh Brady. Highlights of the weekend include a highly stimulating lecture from our new Chancellor and President of Convocation, Sir Paul Nurse and celebrating together at the hugely successful joint Hall Associations dinner, where we heard a most powerful and moving speech from Paul, Lord Boateng (LLB 1973, Honorary LLD 2007). Later in the month, we celebrated the graduation of our students and welcomed a further 4,000 members to the Alumni Association. Once again, we hope all our new graduates will stay engaged with the University and help us build an even stronger and more vibrant alumni community.

Looking ahead, the Convocation and Alumni Association Committee (CAAC) will continue to maintain a relevant agenda appropriate to the University and address the needs and interests of alumni in a number of areas including taking on a more active advisory role, acting as ambassadors for the University and supporting initiatives to increase student employability. We remain committed to furthering alumni engagement and continuing to build a sense of community among our alumni. We look forward to contributing to an even more positive and brighter future for engagement with our alumni worldwide.

## Your expertise could help the leaders of tomorrow

This year we are introducing two exciting institution-wide programmes to support students in their career development through mentoring and professional connections:

1. The University of Bristol alumni mentoring scheme is a structured mentoring programme to support students who come from a widening participation background. If Bristol had a transformational impact on you, and you feel like you can support students through mentoring, please email [alumni-volunteers@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:alumni-volunteers@bristol.ac.uk) to register your interest in the new scheme.

2. Online global lounge: a new online community for students and alumni alike, allowing those within your Bristol network to connect and share expertise in a unique online environment. We will announce its launch by email, so update your details with us to keep up to date: [bristol.ac.uk/alumni/mydetails](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni/mydetails)

### Keep in touch

Telephone **+44 (0)117 394 1046**

Email [alumni@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:alumni@bristol.ac.uk)

Website [bristol.ac.uk/alumni](http://bristol.ac.uk/alumni)

Please note that our privacy policy has changed. Visit <http://bit.ly/2o6uxR8> for more information.

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# Everyone can leave a legacy

**Sheila Anderson (LLB 1956) left a legacy in her Will to create a permanent scholarship fund for students in need of financial support. Having been awarded a State Scholarship when she came to Bristol, Sheila knew the life-changing impact it would have on students like Akosua-Rose Oppon.**

'I am tremendously grateful to have received the scholarship. Not only has it taken a huge burden of debt off my shoulders, but it has also instilled a confidence in me to do well on behalf of the University and Sheila Anderson. I hope to do justice to her legacy by excelling in my prospective field as a Law student.'



**If you believe in Bristol, please contact us to find out more:**

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**[bristol.ac.uk/leave-a-legacy](https://bristol.ac.uk/leave-a-legacy)**



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