Baroness Sal Brinton’s interest in education, skills and learning stems from a 20-year career in the education sector. Since being made a life peer in 2011, she has championed the cause of part-time students in Parliament.

Baroness Brinton says: “I am a great admirer of the work Birkbeck is doing to bring world-class higher education to east London. I live in the heart of Watford, and know what a powerful and positive role education can play in people’s lives.”

Joining Birkbeck as a Lecturer in English in 1979, Professor Steven Connor became Professor of Modern Literature and Theory in 1994. He served as Pro-Vice-Master for International and Research Students, and as College Orator from 2001 to 2012. Through his writing and radio work, he has enlarged the scope of English studies and opened up new methods and subjects in cultural history. In October 2012 he became Grace 2 Professor of English at the University of Cambridge and Fellow of Peterhouse. “Fellows of Birkbeck have the opportunity to represent its work and ideals in the world of education and beyond, an opportunity I am eager to seize,” he says.

Philanthropist and businessman Dr Naim Dangoor first came to the UK from Iraq in the 1930s to study at the University of London. In the 1960s, following political unrest, he was exiled to the UK and built up a successful property development business. He also established The Exilarch’s Foundation, a charitable trust that helps educational projects internationally. Now aged 98, Dr Dangoor was made a CBE in the 2012 New Year’s Honours list. His £1m gift for university scholarships in 2005 fulfilled a promise Dr Dangoor had made to himself decades earlier: that he would find a way to thank the country that gave his family refuge after escaping Baathist Iraq. With his Eliahou Dangoor scholarships, worth over £4m including matched government funding, Dr Dangoor has ensured that students across the country are able to benefit from what is estimated to be the largest private scholarship scheme of its kind in the UK.

Sir Peter Hall is the Bartlett Professor of Planning and Regeneration at The Bartlett, University College London, and President of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA). Knighted for his services to the TCPA in 1998, he is a Fellow of the British Academy. Renowned for his work on the economic, demographic, cultural and management issues that face cities around the globe, Professor Hall began his career at Birkbeck in 1957 as an assistant lecturer in geography. He had an early fascination with the historical development of London and its traditional industries in the East End. “While at Birkbeck I took my students on field trips around Brick Lane, walking streets that hadn’t changed since the 1890s,” he says. “It was a tremendous time of reconstruction for a deprived area, so I think what Birkbeck is doing now in Stratford is wonderful. While the Birkbeck I taught at 55 years ago was a very different place, its mission remains essentially unchanged.”

Professor Michael Hunter, Emeritus Professor of History at Birkbeck, is the world’s foremost expert on Robert Boyle, the seventeenth-century scientist who was one of the founding members of the Royal Society. His biography of the scientist, Boyle: Between God and Science, won both the Samuel Pepys Award and the Roy G Neville Prize. A historian of international stature, Professor Hunter has made an incomparable contribution to the understanding of early modern science. He was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 2007. He says: “Having taught at Birkbeck for virtually my entire academic career, I am delighted to be appointed a Fellow of the College.”
Birkbeck heard with sadness of the death of Professor William George Overend on 18 September, 2012, aged 90.

Professor Overend was Master of Birkbeck from 1979 to 1987. He first joined the College in 1955 as a Reader, becoming Head of the Department of Chemistry in 1957, Vice Master in 1974 and finally Master, as well as Dean of the Faculty of Science, University of London in 1978. He was made a Fellow of the College on his retirement in 1987.

During his time in office Professor Overend worked tirelessly to uphold Birkbeck’s reputation as a centre of excellence in part-time adult education and postgraduate research.

Patricia Stroud, who worked for him for many years, including as his PA during his last year as Master, says: “George Overend was the most even-tempered man I have ever met, and I cannot remember a single occasion on which he lost his equanimity ... He was one of the most egalitarian of men, fairly formal in manner but kind and unpatronising to all who worked for him.”

Birkbeck Fellow Dr Ron James, a former student of Professor Overend, says: “Professor Overend was head of Chemistry at the time I took my degree at Birkbeck, and I was fortunate to attend a series of lectures by him in my final year that pulled together various parts of the chemistry we had learned throughout the course into a coherent whole.

“I remember he was fond of saying things like: ‘It’s no use knowing all about bricks if you do not know how to use them to build a house’. He taught me a lot.”