Peter Zinkin, Birkbeck governor, explains why he gives to provide financial support for Birkbeck students

I believe that as members of the governing body at Birkbeck, if we expect other people to give, then we must be willing to lead by example. If those of us who are in a position where we are able to give don’t do so, then how can we expect it from those for whom it is more difficult?

Higher education is a great enabler. If you have a university education, then suddenly your range of life choices expands. There are very few things that you can do in life that will increase the opportunities open to you in that way.

We need a culture change, with expectations being set when students embark on their studies, so that if you take advantage of the opportunities made available to you by a university education and do well, then you are under an obligation to give something back. In the United States, 10 per cent of university alumni give to their institution, compared to one per cent in the UK. They have a much stronger culture and expectation of giving than we do. Birkbeck alumni are perhaps better placed than more traditional students to understand the value of their university education, and I am pleased to say that in the last year, three per cent of Birkbeck alumni gave to the College, although we are still some way off the US figure.

Of course, giving is not always about money. Birkbeck is lucky to have many alumni who give their time to act as mentors to our undergraduates and as volunteers at events. For many people, giving of their time is another equally, if not more, valuable way to give back to the institution and its students.

We know that there are students who struggle with their finances while studying, and given the importance of higher education as a way of opening up choice (which is one of the best things we can do for people), I believe that universities have an obligation to work with their alumni, be it to ask for money or for time. If they don’t do this, they will be wasting a valuable resource which could be helping to widen choice and opportunity for others. The support provided by alumni can be the difference between finishing a degree or not for many students. It enables them to access opportunities that would not otherwise be open to them and to transform their lives.

To donate, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/alumni/supporting-birkbeck
To volunteer, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/alumni/alumni-services/volunteering
To find out more, email Chris Murphy, Head of Development and Alumni: c.murphy@bbk.ac.uk

Why I give

Donating to Birkbeck

Birkbeck students rely on philanthropic support now more than ever before. Our Alumni Fund (donations of £1–£999) provides financial support, as well as books and equipment, for those students who need it most.

The Master’s Circle is a community of Birkbeck’s close friends who donate £1,000–£4,999 per year to the College. Membership of the Master’s Circle has almost doubled in the last year. Donors are offered various benefits, such as an invitation to the Annual Master’s Circle Lecture. In 2013 we will be launching our annual tour and installing a donor board in the reception area of our main building.

In order to respond to the growing number of donors already giving £5,000–£24,999 each year, the 1823 Circle will be launched in 2013. This group will receive an invitation to the Master’s Foundation Day Dinner, and an exclusive Birkbeck history tour, as well as the other benefits available to Master’s Circle donors. Thank you to all our supporters for helping to build a culture of philanthropy at Birkbeck.

Above: Peter Zinkin at the ‘topping out’ ceremony for the new University Square Stratford building