

# University of Bristol: TheirStories



## Presenters:

Tracy Brunnock, Head of Diversity & Inclusion (Staff)

Lauren Curtis, Diversity & Inclusion Advisor (Staff)

Rebecca Scott, Employability & Opportunities Manager

# How it started

- The concept was first introduced as HerStories in 2016 on a much smaller scale as an initiative to support staff who identify as female in the workplace.
- Speakers shared the personal and professional aspects of their journey, with a particular focus on the barriers they had faced due to their gender and how these were overcome.
- As well as providing role models, it provided a networking opportunity for female academic and professional services staff.

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# HerStories

Career  
Seminar  
Series



## 'Love, Life and Career Success'

With Sam Budd, Chief Executive of Bristol SU  
Tuesday 20 March 2018, 1pm - 2pm

In celebration of International Women's Day 2018, come to hear Sam talk about a life journey balancing mixed heritage, single parenting, social mobility and mental health; life's challenges set alongside a successful career spanning recruitment, training and education.

The seminar will include a talk and a Q&A  
Open to all University of Bristol staff

To book go to [Eventbrite](#) and search for HerStories

In case of questions please contact:  
[equality-bookings@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:equality-bookings@bristol.ac.uk)  
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team



# From HerStories to TheirStories

- We wanted to be more inclusive of non-binary colleagues.
- We wanted a more diverse range of speakers.
- Capitalise on the potential for building understanding across all of our people – both in terms of things we have in common and the differences that make us unique individuals.
- HerStories became TheirStories and was relaunched in 2018.

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# Sharing a story

- Requires bravery as our storytellers move away from their professional persona and share their own unique personal stories.
- Closes professional distances and enables our leaders to engage with staff on a human level, building trust and engagement through authenticity.
- Requires all of our speakers to be vulnerable.



What Bosses Gain by Being Vulnerable

[hbr.org](http://hbr.org)

***‘Why is human connection missing at work? As leaders and employees, we are often taught to keep a distance and project a certain image. An image of confidence, competence and authority. We may disclose our vulnerability to a spouse or close friend behind closed doors at night but we would never show it elsewhere during the day, let alone at work’.***

There are powerful strengths in Difference



# Celebrating key events



Helen Wodehouse Building  
35 Berkeley Square  
Bristol  
BS8 1JA

Thursday 7 March 2019  
12:30 – 13:30

Open to all University of Bristol staff

**Professor Judith Squires**

**“Engendering Academic Ambition”**

In celebration of International Women’s Day 2019 come to hear Judith talk about her journey to becoming our Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost, her reflections on the importance of mainstreaming gender equality in higher education and the challenges and opportunities facing the University as it seeks to foster an inclusive academic community

**TheirStories**

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## HerStories Councillor Asher Craig



### HerStories: Cllr Asher Craig -My Journey-Racism, Politics and Leadership

2018 marks 100 years since Parliament passed a law which allowed the first women, and all men, to vote for the first time. Celebrate this milestone by sharing in Asher’s personal story of her journey to Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member for Communities, Events & Equalities for the city of Bristol. The seminar will include a tale and a Q&A.

**Date:** Monday 26<sup>th</sup> Nov

**Time:** 12-2pm

**Location:** Queens Building 1.6

[Tickets available on Eventbrite](#)

Staff Only Event



# Celebrating key events

- **Their Stories: Robert Kerse - Sometimes I wake up and wonder how I got here**
- To celebrate International Men's Day, our Chief Operating Officer, Robert Kerse will talk about his personal and professional journey.
- *19 November 2019, 12.30 PM - 19 November 2019, 1.30 PM*



# Raising awareness



*'TheirStories is a fantastic thing at the UoB. For me, I found it useful and almost cathartic to speak about past events in my life; for both educating others about perhaps an 'unseen' side of being transgender, as well as for being able to get things out in a way that I haven't been able to before. I also believe that giving a platform for anyone with a story to speak is fantastic, regardless of their position in the university, this creates inclusivity and gives staff the opportunity to learn about many of the different backgrounds within the UoB community.'*

**Amelia Pereira, 2020**



# Feedback

*It made me realise that although we might be miles apart on the grading scale, we have more in common than I would have imagined – they struggle with the same issues that I do.*

*...everyone has their own experiences that shape them and that they carry around things that you just aren't aware of. Behind every colleague is a history which shapes the person in front of you.*

*It was something I will always remember and was a fantastic way to break down barriers and see colleagues and senior staff as 'human beings' with the same 'stuff' to deal with as all of us.*



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**Charlie Cowley**  
**School Manager**  
**School of Accounting & Finance**



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**Dr. Myma Baptist, FHEA**  
eBiolabs Development and Support  
Officer

# Our final in-person sessions in 2020...

**Their Stories: Dr Mike McBeth – my (gay) academic life: from Thatcher to Johnson: politics, academia and the (on-going) battle for equality.**

This talk explores the journey to becoming an academic from a non-traditional background and reflects on the importance of support, pride and openness. The focus will be on the challenges faced by a working class, northern, gay man in academia and the opportunities to integrate activism and promote equality in higher education.

- *4 February 2020, 12.30 PM 1.30 PM*

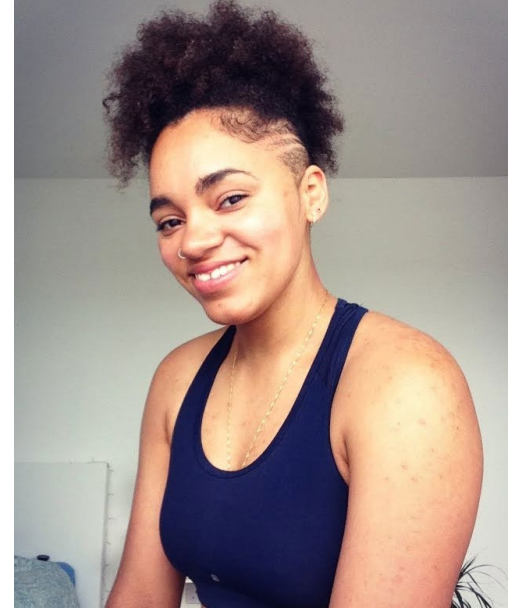


# Then the pandemic hit...so we moved to sharing stories in writing

July 2020

**Noah Sapla, Wellbeing Access Administrator and BAME rep for the LGBT+ Staff Network.**

*I grew up in Tottenham, North London with my younger sister and parents. My Zambian and very religious father always set the bar high for me, so I went to a Catholic Girls' Grammar School an hour away from home in North Finchley. Academically it was a great school, but the huge majority of students (and teachers) were white girls from privileged backgrounds, which as a black girl from a low-income family I often found challenging and isolating...*



**May 2020**

**Professor Leon Tikly**

*Both my parents were teachers and we had a modest but comfortable childhood growing up in East Finchley in North London. I am the eldest of five children (three natural siblings and one fostered). We all attended local state schools.*

*Although we may have ended up achieving more if we had gone to grammar or private school, I am glad in hindsight that I went to a comprehensive because of the chance it gave me to get to know children from diverse class and cultural backgrounds...*



**June 2020**

**Simon Gamble, Head of Academic Study Skills and Co-Chair, Staff  
LGBT+ Network**

*I'm from a working-class northern background, first in my family to go to University and one of the last to receive a student grant. Growing up gay in the 1980s was damaging and I think my generation still carries a lot of scars from those days. It's hard to relate to if you don't experience it, but constantly being told by your school, the press, television, society, government and church that you are bad person for who you are is a deep form of psychological bullying, particularly at that age, and that damage never really leaves you.*

*On the days I still beat myself up for not being good enough I try to remind myself that everything I've achieved is a marker of strength and determination, and in spite of all that hatred, I've actually survived and maybe that's good enough...*



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# Moving online

**TheirStories - Dr Erik Lithander: And now what? Reflections on an entirely accidental career that has nonetheless occasionally made perfect sense.**

*8 December 2020, 12.00 PM - 1.00 PM*

**Online event**

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# Summing Up

- TheirStories is contributing towards transformational culture change by connecting people from all levels and elevating organisational understanding of diversity in its broadest sense.
- We believe it is making a vital contribution to building workplace inclusion; improving employee engagement; and developing a culture of belonging.
- Developing a culture where staff can bring their true authentic self to work remains a key strategic priority for the University of Bristol: if any of our people must cover part of their identity to feel included, this is not true inclusion.



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**Asha Sahni**  
**Assistant Governance Officer**  
**Strategic Planning and Governance Office**

**We would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who has been a part of *HerStories* and *TheirStories*.**

**Without their willingness to share their stories so openly with others, we would not be here today.**

**We would also like to thank Rebecca, Amelia, Charlie, Myrna and Asha for their contributions today.**

**Thank you.**

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