



# Equality for all



## Achieving at DMU

At DMU, we champion, promote and celebrate the diversity of our staff and students. Find out more about our inspirational staff below.

### Aamena Meidell

*Student Exchange Officer, Social Impact and Engagement*



#### **How long have you worked at DMU and what do you do?**

I have worked at DMU for two and a half years, although it feels like I've been here much longer! I am a Student Exchange Officer and work in the Global Mobility Office in the Social Impact and Engagement Directorate. I am responsible for looking after both incoming and outgoing exchange students at DMU. This includes amongst other things, a mix of promoting and marketing, planning events, engaging with students and stakeholders (where I occasionally get to use my Spanish) and lots of paperwork and administration. The activities vary depending on the time of year and I enjoy the multi-faceted aspect of the job - there is never a dull moment!

#### **What does gender equality mean to you?**

That all genders have equal rights and opportunities. One gender should not have an advantage over another in terms of accessing the society, pursuing careers, carrying out familiar duties etc. That the interests, needs and priorities of all genders are recognised and taken into consideration in all situations, no matter the age, background and race of the individual.

#### **How can we amplify women's voices at DMU?**

I always go back to representation as being key. There has been a long history of men making decisions for women across all institutions and aspects of life (see *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men* – Caroline Criado Perez). A seemingly simple solution that can have a huge impact in ensuring that women's voices are heard, yet for some reason has been so difficult to accomplish!

Therefore, wherever forums are constructed, consultations taking place, or a change being made, there should be a conscious effort made to ensure that there is fair representation of women included to ensure our voice is amplified and action taken accordingly to achieve recommended outcomes.

Secondly, in a broader sense I think mechanisms like this one (the newsletter and DMU Women more generally) are fantastic as it provides a safe space for prevalent topics related to women to be discussed and directly feed into other activity at DMU. From the voices of women that we do hear otherwise, it tends to be women in levels of seniority. This is undoubtedly important and necessary, however having an avenue where women in mid or junior level roles can feature more regularly is perhaps an opportunity that can be taken advantage of, to allow women of different levels share ideas and foster solidarity amongst ourselves.

### **What is the best advice you have ever been given?**

One piece of advice that has stuck with me is to always look to those who have less than you, rather than upwards. In the first instance, this does sound like it's stifling ambition as looking upwards is usually the metaphor used to describe progress and achievement. However, it has been useful in reminding me to see the wider picture regarding women. Thinking about how far we have come in how we've progressed, but it also makes me feel lucky to be in the position I am in today. It makes me feel privileged and serves as a reminder to try and give back to women who have not been as lucky where possible.

### **Who inspires you and why?**

My inspiration changes often, however the constant theme is always a strong woman, particularly from women around me in my life. When we think of inspiration, sometimes we picture an individual who is outspoken about their beliefs and ideas, and I have definitely felt inspired by women who reflect these attributes. That kind of energy is positive and necessary to sometimes push you that extra mile and I am lucky to have colleagues right here at DMU who have inspired me in this way. On the other hand, there are also women who may not seem strong in the usual sense of the world, but getting to know them and learning about the challenges they have had to overcome, the way they were able to demonstrate patience in the face of adversity and keep focused on their priorities is also really inspirational for me.

### **What challenges have you had as a woman and how did you overcome them?**

I don't think I've had any significant issues that have been a problem, but I don't think that's necessarily the way in which challenges often present themselves either. Sometimes it's the smaller things that eat away at you and can lead to potential exhaustion – am I describing microaggressions well enough here?

Self-doubt, the lack of confidence and fearing the judgement of others as a hijab-wearing Muslim woman of ethnic minority, have all crept into my conscience at one stage or another, however I have overcome this by being true to myself and what I've achieved so far, being confident in my abilities and communicating where necessary.

## **Amina Chitembo**

*Lecturer and PhD Researcher, Faculty of Business and Law*



### **How long have you worked at DMU and what do you do?**

I started my PhD in April 2019 and became a part time lecturer in September 2019. My research is exploring factors that shape the identities of black African Highly Skilled Migrant (HSM) women's career mobility. It is focussing on drivers and barriers that impact on their self-inclusion into leadership in public sector organisations. I use self-inclusion because my research is not looking at structural issues, it is looking at how these women find their place and reconstruct their identity to include themselves in the spaces where they wish to participate in leadership. It has strong links to SDGs 5, 10, and 16.

Regarding teaching, I love teaching, I am mostly a seminar tutor in Human Resources Management and Organisational behaviour. I have recently obtained my PGCert in Learning and teaching in higher education and become a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy which helps me serve my students to the best of my ability.

### **What does gender equality mean to you?**

To me equality means balanced roles, equal opportunities, and equal pay. Women can do whatever they feel able to do. I prefer using gender balance as opposed to equality because often I have heard some people, especially from my culture, say well if you want equality then you must be doing all the work that men do. That is not what women are seeking. There are certain jobs that are anatomically orientated towards men, however, if a man thinks they make a good midwife perfect, if a woman wants to dig trenches and carry heavy loads on a building site that is perfect too. We just need to have equal opportunities and not be discounted.

### **How can we amplify women's voices at DMU?**

We need to start at the top, let us have a balance in visibility and opportunities for leadership roles. It means not just gender, but ethnicity, race, and ability (people with disabilities). DMU has a highly diverse student pool. Let us lead by example because the voice comes with visibility.

### **What is the best advice you have ever been given?**

If you don't like it, change it, if you can't change it, change the way you respond to it. Another one is a quote from Zig Ziglar "You don't have to be great to start, but you have to start to be great".

### **We encourage all DMU Women to prioritise self-care, do you have any tips you can share?**

Great question! For a woman in her late 40's, doing a PhD, in addition to being a mother of four with the youngest being seven years old. Let's see, I have struggled with my mental health which then slips into my physical health, but one of the best things we can do as women is to allow ourselves to be vulnerable and ask for help. Take time out to do what you love. I love travelling, even if that hasn't happened in 2020-21.

### **What professional achievement are you most proud of and why?**

Even though I have not completed the journey yet, it's my PhD Research, firstly I am proud because I never thought of myself as academic let alone taking on this level of study. Starting out life as a teenage mother, growing up in Zambia and having dyslexia which was diagnosed in my 40's, the odds were kind of against me. My PhD is not just for me, it is for all women who have been told they can't, especially highly skilled migrant women who feel stuck and deskilled. That is why I founded Migrants Leadership Institute, I aim to see more HSM women sitting at the table and bringing their own chair if needed.

**Who inspires you and why?**

There are many people who inspire me if I can name a few. My late mum and how she lived her life without fear and taught us to do the same. Looking at the world now I get inspired by looking at women like Meghan Markle and Jacinda Arden. I have had more inspiring men in my life so while I can't name them all, I do appreciate their mentorship. I am an activist feminist researcher and my greatest advisors are my partner and my three male supervisors for whom I am grateful.

**What challenges have you had as a woman and how did you overcome them?**

By far my greatest challenge was my dyslexia before I knew what it was. Once it was confirmed, I knew I was different and not dull. I have since accepted myself and found ways of managing, I have gone on to write books and helped others to write their books and get published. It has helped me to keep checking my spellings, improve my grammar, and my understanding of what I read even if it takes me longer than a neurotypical person.

## **Bev Hancock-Smith**

*Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Learning and Study Support*



“Oh, is that a picture of you on your wedding day. How lovely! But who’s that woman standing next to you wearing a bride’s dress?”

“Errr....my wife...”

I count myself very lucky: I can count on one hand my experiences of homophobia. Most of them are just blunders like the one above (which happened 10 years ago at my previous job), which leave the blunderer feeling worse than I do. But I know that’s not the case for everyone. And that’s why being visible, being open about my sexuality, my identity: a lesbian, a lecturer and a harassed mother of seven-year-old twins, is really important to me. I also count myself lucky that I work for an institution that doesn’t just pay lip service to inclusivity but goes out of its way to celebrate it. It’s why I arrived on my first day at DMU and felt confident in placing the photo of me on my wedding day (and a woman standing next to me wearing a bride’s dress) on my desk.

I’ve worked at DMU since 2018 as a lecturer in a Learning and Study Support. It’s a great job. I get to work with students lecturing on their programmes as well as individually when students are looking for a bit of extra support and reassurance with their work. Sharing someone’s ‘light-bulb’ moment when they discover how to do something, or giving them a confidence boost that they can do this, is one of the most rewarding parts of the job. I try to be open and honest in my teaching, bringing my whole self to work. The pandemic certainly helped this as my whole self plus my whole family often came to work; my seven-year-old son looming onto camera in MS Teams demanding food whilst I tried to deliver a session on report writing! But this is a good thing. The more we can be open with who we are as people, as well as employees, the more we help to break down barriers.

Over my three years at DMU I’ve been actively involved in the LGBTQ+ Network as well as taking part in the Committee that organises #DMUPride. The annual event is a celebration of the LGBTQ community at DMU and across the city. Events range from quiz nights, gay cinema and theatre performances to lectures of the impact on dementia in LGBTQ+ people. It’s fantastic to see students and colleagues from across the institution donning their #DMUPride t-shirts and rainbow lanyards and coming together to support, champion and celebrate the LGBTQ+ community.

I sincerely hope that this culture of inclusivity that DMU fosters helps other members of staff and students feel confident and comfortable to be themselves; that that they know that their identity, be it gay, bi, trans, is not simply accepted at DMU, but celebrated. And if wearing my rainbow lanyard year-round, cluttering my desk with pictures of my kids and their two mums, and sharing this profile helps to foster that, then I’m happy. Still harassed, but happy.

## **David Dee**

*Associate Professor/Reader in Modern History, Faculty of Art, Design and Humanities*



David Dee is an Associate Professor/Reader in Modern History at DMU, his expertise being focused on immigration/ethnic History.

David took Shared Parental Leave (SPL) – introduced in the UK in 2015 - between January and July 2020 after the birth of his daughter Abigail.

"I'd been aware of Shared Parental Leave for a while when my wife and I found out we were expecting our first child in 2019, and it was something that we were both very keen to look into. There is a huge amount of information out there about SPL, which at sometimes is quite overwhelming, but I found that DMU's own guidelines were really clear and easy to follow. I also found DMU's HR team and my own Line Manager very knowledgeable about the scheme and very helpful. After initially being daunted by the arrangements with both of our employers, my wife and I found things were organised really smoothly."

David looks back really positively about his time on Shared Parental Leave:

"Taking Shared Parental Leave was one of the best decisions I have ever made. Being around for the first few months of Abigail's life and really being able to get stuck into parenthood, all whilst knowing that I had continued support from DMU, was great. I would encourage all prospective parents to look at the SPL scheme as it had huge benefits for our family."

David is happy to talk about his experiences regarding SPL to anyone who may be interested in the scheme. His email address is [ddee@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:ddee@dmu.ac.uk)

**Hardeep Kaur Basra (PFHEA)**

*Academic Development Consultant & Associate Professor Teaching & Learning*

**How long have you worked at DMU and what do you do?**

I have worked at DMU for nearly four years, and I am an Associate Professor of Teaching and Learning (T&L) and an Academic Development Consultant. In this role I am the institutional lead for the Advance HE accredited provision, which includes the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice/Academic Professional Apprenticeship (PGCAP/APA) and the HEA Professional Recognition Scheme. I provide strategic leadership in a range of T&L initiatives, and I also lead an Expert Group for the Decolonising DMU Project tasked in producing a toolkit to help deliver an anti-racist institution. I proactively embed and champion the decolonising curricula and pedagogy agenda. I am also a co-chair for the Race Equality Network (REN) Staff Network.

**What does gender equality mean to you?**

I would describe myself as an academic activist, and as such I work very hard to address all inequalities. As someone who has had the unfortunate experience of encountering gender discrimination, I feel it is very important through education and meaningful action that equality is championed to enable all women to achieve their best and to have the same equality of opportunity.

**How can we amplify women's voices at DMU?**

We need to create safe and active platforms for women to share their lived experience, so we can learn what works and what does not. This would then empower DMU Women to take further action. We also need more women to mentor and sponsor others, those succeeding should help others to progress and accomplish too.

**What is the best advice you have ever been given?**

I was once told to "just be the best version of yourself". From this I learnt being authentic is key. Trying to be something you are not, or trying to put a version of yourself forward because you think that is what people want to see is not ideal. Be true to yourself, recognise your strengths and recognise where you can add value.

**We encourage all DMU Women to prioritise self-care, do you have any tips you can share?**

I have recently taken up running and I find this really good for my mental health. It gives me a chance to destress from work and escape from an ever busy homelife. Running is me time!

**Who inspires you and why?**

My mum is my inspiration; widowed in her early 30s with four young children, she worked tirelessly to ensure we were provided for. She put us all through university and helped ensure we had a prosperous future. Her work ethic is to be admired and her willingness to always put others first has encouraged me to always take the extra step to go above and beyond. And more recently, my daughter (with along with her cousin) has been truly inspirational - she is raising funds for The Little Princesses Trust, who make wigs for children with cancer.

**What professional achievement are you most proud of and why?**

I recently became a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education (PFHEA) for demonstrating strategic leadership in learning and teaching, and much of my recognition focused on the work I have done on addressing equality and diversity in learning and teaching. I am only fifth academic to achieve this at DMU, and one of handful of women of colour to receive this accolade in the sector. Considering I do not hold a post carrying positional authority or one that has significant seniority getting this achievement is even more special; it recognises my willingness to go above and beyond and my ability to make sustained strategic impact at institutional, national and international level.

**What challenges have you had in your career and how did you overcome them?**

I started my career as a lecturer in International Relations but was often on fixed term fractional posts. This carried on for nearly 10 years and I never seemed to be able to get that break. Whether this had anything to do with my gender or race it is hard to say, but did I feel I was denied opportunities. In the end I transitioned away from being a subject disciplinary academic to one focusing on enhancing learning and teaching practice. Within this type of academic position, I feel I have been able to add greater value and reward as I am shaping and influencing the teaching practice of others to enhance the student learning experience. I think being resilient and taking on constructive feedback has been the cornerstone to my professional development. Recognising weaknesses, taking positive action and turning them into strengths. I think you need to find your voice and create your own opportunities and not rely on others to open the door of opportunity for you.

**What does being co-chair of the Race Equality Staff Network mean to you?**

I know in this role by working with others I am making a difference to my fellow Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority colleagues. Whether this is through active campaigning for changes in institutional policies and processes, or by supporting career progression through mentoring, workshops or guidance or just by creating opportunities to listen and bring like minded colleagues together. Also, as a co-chair I have the chance to work collaboratively with the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) team and the Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor EDI to collectively support the wider agenda. Lastly, I have the pleasure to work alongside two experienced co-chairs, Atika Kohli and Sherilyn Pereira, and their insight and steer is invaluable. Together we are a dream team!

## **Imogen Perkins**

*Mental Health Intervention Officer, Student and Academic Services*



My name is Imogen but most people know me as lmy. I'm pansexual, and have a diagnosis of PTSD with Depression (when it wants to rear its ugly head!), and I want to let you know that sexuality or your mental health should never be something to hold you back or define you. For me, although they've defiantly impacted my journey of getting where I am today, I've not let them hold me back, and I want to show you and be that role model that lets you know you don't have to either. Growing up I had an interesting start in life, which led me to wanting to work in mental health to help others who may have been through what I had. I suffered significant trauma from a young age which needed intense therapy to process, as well as being a registered carer for my mum and younger brother from 11-18. Things were hard, really hard, but I persevered.

I studied and trained hard to be psychiatric nurse, with university being the pinnacle of my self-acceptance for both things that had happened to me, but also really getting comfortable with my sexuality. It was a great time to find who I was and I was surrounded by incredible friends that supported me with this.

When I got my first role I was over the moon. This was in an acute psychiatric ward, and it became a foundation for me and future progression. It wasn't all roses and rainbows though, and there were periods of toxicity and internalised misogyny which really put a damper on me working through any triggers or being as out and open as I usually would be. Due to this I left, but joined a new team working in a psychiatric intensive care ward, where I truly felt accepted.

This move led to me embracing myself on a deeper level when it came to my sexuality, which was helped by my manager at the time also being open and a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community. It was here that I started work on my book, that was supported and hyped by all my team mates, as I knew I wanted to get my story out there to show people they could overcome atrocity and still thrive. It was also here that I really started to think about working in a university with students. I had been a student lead on both wards, as well as a trainer for my trust, and my deputy matron at the time talked about how both were a strength of mine and I really needed to consider it.

I left that ward due to promotion and moving on to become a senior psychiatric nurse and trauma, low mood, and anxiety lead for child and adolescent inpatient services which really allowed me to further embrace my sexuality. Working with younger generations that were posting regularly on TikTok and other social medias about themselves, their identities, and their struggles, really helped me to reflect on and embrace my own, which in turn made me a better nurse and role model for them.

Coming to DMU since then has been an amazing experience. Not only has the shift in work hours and work life balance allowed me to finish projects (such as publish my book and embrace my Instagram blog), but I've joined a team that embraces that individuality and experience both professional and personal. Not only that, representation is so important in our university. Students

are going through a major transitionary period in their life, and they want to know it's safe to be who they are – unapologetically exploring their identify with professionals who support this process. I'm so happy and proud to walk around with my pink, purple, and blue hair (the bisexuality flag), rainbow lanyard, and pentagram (Ps: I'm Wiccan!) – it brings me so much joy knowing my out, loud, and proud pansexual wiccan self helps others feel safe and able to truly express themselves too!

**Katie Normington**

*Vice-Chancellor*



I feel proud to be the first woman Vice-Chancellor at DMU. In saying that, it does feel that the time is well past that we should be recognising women as doing things for the first time. But unfortunately, it isn't. While about 30% of VCs are now women, it's not unusual for me to be the only one in a room at some meetings.

It's easy now, with a good job, and two grown up children at university, to forget what the many years of being a single parent and full-time working mum were like. Every day was a juggling act, just trying to muddle through without dropping a ball. Of course, they did get dropped. But it was important to me that I showed my kids that anything was possible!

I've been mindful of supporting women in my career through establishing a women's promotion project, although I've mentored all sorts of people. The important thing for me is to enable others to come up behind you, rather than pull the ladder up after you.

## **Leanne Herbert**

*Training & Business Development Officer*



### **Tell us about yourself**

My name is Leanne Herbert and I joined DMU in 2009 as a Faculty Disability Coordinator in The Faculty of Technology as it was then. My education and early career were in the field of beauty, holistic and sports therapies where I was fortunate to have spent two years working in spa's and gyms on cruise liners in the USA and the Caribbean. It was during this time that I began to experience symptoms of weakness in my legs with investigations leading to a diagnosis of Limb Girdle Muscular Dystrophy, Dysferlinopathy.

The impact of my newly diagnosed disability meant re-thinking my incredibly physically demanding career and so I became a college lecturer and continued my studies in teacher education. It was as a result of working with disabled and dyslexic students as well as learning to live with and self-advocate about my own disability that I became passionate about disability equality and inclusion. My own experiences have taught me that life with a disability is challenging and rarely ever straight forward and support can be key in enabling someone to succeed.

It has been during my time at DMU that I have had the most opportunity to change and grow, both personally and professionally. I completed my part-time LLB in 2014 whilst also having my son in 2012. This year I have also completed my part-time MA in Education Practice. I have held a number of roles in the 12 years that I have been at DMU, including leading the introduction of the Autism Team as part of Disability Advice and Support. My current role as Training and Business Development Officer allows me to share skills and good practice that I have learned over the years with staff on how to work more confidently and effectively with students that have disabilities, medical conditions, learning differences e.g. dyslexia and mental health conditions.

As a disabled person, I rely upon the understanding and support of others, as well as personal care support at work provided through the *Access to Work* scheme. I now use a powered wheelchair fulltime as my condition has progressed to weaken the muscles in my legs, arms and hands, but this rarely stops me from doing what I want to do. I exercise regularly and love days out where access is guaranteed (this is gradually improving). I also took up crochet during lockdown and am slightly obsessed! I have wonderful friends, a lot who I have met working at DMU (you know who you are), a very patient husband and an energetic 9-year-old who all fill my life with fun.

### **Who are your role models?**

Anyone who speaks up about the rights of disabled people is a role model for me. Life with a disability can be frustrating, upsetting and often infuriating and so individuals who see past this and focus on the brighter side are important to me. I have had the pleasure of meeting Matt Hampson a number of times and his 'Get Busy Living' philosophy helps me to see the positive side of living with a disability. He has also encouraged me to do things that I feel that aren't possible or as easy because I use a powered wheelchair, like overseas travel.

I am a massive fan of comedy, and never fail to be uplifted by watching my current favourite disabled comedians, Rosie Jones, Lee Ridley and Hannah Gadsby.

**What urgent changes do we need to see in the world?**

Accessibility and acceptance are most important to me. Our world is still incredibly ableist, seeing disability as something bad or to pity. Whilst my life is challenging, I attribute a lot of my success and resilience to my disability.

Things that affect my day to day life that I would absolutely love to change are firstly the ability to make bookings as a disabled person, whether that be to a theatre, a concert, for a hotel, or a holiday because it is a nightmare! It always requires many more phone calls or hoops to go through and it is almost impossible to book to do something when there are three of you (as I am in my little family). Accessible hotel rooms for example often only accommodate two people and if you ever come to the theatre with me and we are more than a two, I see you in the bar after the show!

Another change I would like to see is in relation to the cost of things for disabled people. If you have ever bought an exercise bike, how much did it cost? My accessible exercise bike cost nearly £5,000! What about the last time you bought a toilet? Accessible toilets can cost up to £4,000! Even bed sheets. I've just had to replace my specialist bed sheet at just over £300 and yet the nature of my disability means I work part-time.

## **Manjeet Ridon**

*Associate Dean (International)*



### **We encourage all DMU Women to prioritise self-care, do you have any tips you can share?**

I love swimming and find it is a great way for me to step away from a busy work and home life and focus on my breathing and enjoy some quiet time by myself. Regular exercise like swimming really helps me to work on my fitness and stamina.

### **Who inspires and why?**

Quiet, unassuming and intelligent women who achieved amazing things in their lifetime. For example, Rosa Parks was an inspiring woman, called "the mother of the civil rights movement" because she inspired the struggle for racial equality in the USA in the 1950s, when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama. This small action led to the Montgomery Bus Boycott and inspired thousands to follow in her footsteps. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "Notorious RBG", is another inspiring woman who helped to bring about equality and activism for women. She's famous for so many iconic quotes, for example, "fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you".

### **What professional achievement are you most proud of and why?**

I studied for my PhD while having a baby and whilst it was a challenging time, organising my many responsibilities as a doctoral student with the demands of a new baby, I am very proud of this achievement. During my study I was able to immerse myself in interesting research, and explored the literary and cinematic representations of myth in the literature and film of South Asian diasporic women writers and filmmakers in Canada and the USA. This specialised focus was contextualised within a wider interest in the contemporary cultural production of other ethnic and minority groups in North America, in particular the literature of African-American and Native American writers. This interest in minority viewpoints is something that has stayed with me throughout my professional career, and it is one of the reasons why I am passionate about equality, diversity and inclusion in my academic career in higher education. It is also why I have been supporting the University's Decolonising DMU initiative.

### **What challenges have you faced in your career?**

In my experience, women face many challenges especially if they are ambitious and want to move up the ladder. Some of the challenges can be the structures in organisations which might make it difficult for women to progress, but sometimes the challenge can be ourselves too. I have at times lacked confidence, which has held me back from applying to some senior roles. Over the years, I have developed more confidence through leadership training, mentoring and coaching, and this has really helped.

## **Marian Chijoke-Mgbame**

*Senior Lecturer in Accounting & Finance, Faculty of Business and Law*



### **How long have you worked at DMU and what do you do?**

I joined DMU in December 2016 as a lecturer and currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Accounting and Finance. I am the deputy director for the Centre for Research on Accountability Governance and Sustainability (CRAGS). My research area is on corporate governance and corporate sustainability with particular focus on strategic decisions making and board effectiveness. I am currently leading on two projects in these areas. The first project, which is externally funded is looking at how organisations in the global south can make the transition from mere corporate social responsibility to becoming more sustainable in their activities. The second project focusses on the challenge's women face on corporate boards and how female representation can be increased on corporate boards and in leadership roles.

### **What does gender equality mean to you?**

For me, I would rather describe it as gender equity, that is recognising the difference between genders and providing the opportunities for both to express themselves and reach their full potential. It should be a matter of choice whether people take up available opportunities and not a case of being disadvantaged due to their gender.

### **How can we amplify women's voices at DMU?**

By deliberately creating opportunities that will increase the visibility of women in every aspect of the university. This should start right from the departmental level up. Are there women represented in committees? Are they supervising and examining PhDs? Are they being given programme and module leadership roles? It is from these opportunities and experiences women are able to demonstrate their leadership skills and then take up senior leadership roles. There should be effective policies to close the "leaky pipeline".

### **What is the best advice you have ever been given?**

I have been given various advice for different circumstances from parenting to career, to health and wellbeing and so on. However, two stand out and sum it all up: to always do my best and never to give up.

### **We encourage all DMU Women to prioritise self-care, do you have any tips you can share?**

Sometimes life gets really busy but I try to exercise at home or go to the gym, swim and ride my bike. I also love listening to music.

**Who inspires you and why?**

There are lots of people who inspire me in different situations, but most of all, anyone who is hardworking and humble especially women who go through so many challenges but still show up.

**What professional achievement are you most proud of and why?**

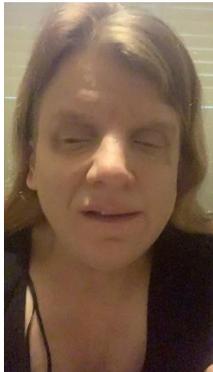
It was a very tough decision for me to leave my one-year old baby and three-year-old daughter for my PhD studies here in the UK. I'm proud that I was able to successfully complete it and to see the various opportunities that it has brought not just to me but to my family and friends, especially those who aspire to further their studies. I am also grateful to have received external funding for my research, which has given me the confidence to venture into other aspects of my career.

**What challenges have you had in your career and how did you overcome them?**

Juggling family life and career has been a bit challenging, having young kids and trying to do research has not been easy. However, having a good support system from family, friends and colleagues has been very helpful. From time-to-time I also feel this "imposter syndrome". I have been able to cope with it by telling myself "if you have been invited to the table, someone has seen something in you, so go for it and give it your best."

## **Meredith Wilkinson**

*Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences*



I was born with my visual impairment so it's what's referred to as congenital, but I was fortunate enough to have strong parents when I was growing up who helped me live in a fully sighted world, as that is of course the world I live in. I am so grateful they did this, as it really did give me the best start in life.

After completing my PhD at Lancaster University, I came to DMU in 2012 to take up post as a Postdoctoral Research Assistant in Psychology. I then progressed to a lectureship in Health Studies (now Health and Wellbeing in Society) and then moved back to Psychology to take up a senior lectureship.

Firstly, I don't really see myself as a role model I just travel through life as me which maybe is enough. As to why I decided to be a role model, I think it's all about representation. When I was at university and starting in my early career I didn't really see many people - who was if one wishes to refer to it as such like me as in an individual - with a visible disability. The implication I think of this is that there are questions I would have wanted to ask that perhaps only those individuals that could answer them.

The second reason is to be of service to others. I have been blessed to have such supportive mentors, collaborators and colleagues over the years I hope that perhaps by doing this I can be useful to someone else.

I think the biggest barrier one can face is themselves in terms of their thought processes. This is a consequence of multiple things self-doubt, lack of confidence and so on. As I've gotten older I've learned to take more opportunities and create more opportunities for myself. For example, I've had an article published in Times Higher Education on the importance of flexibility for universities in their teaching post-pandemic especially when it comes to students with disabilities and carers. Before, I think I wouldn't have written that as I would have been perhaps too nervous to do so, but now I think the potential benefits that come from that far outweigh any nerves or doubts I may have.

I think the idea of striving for equality is very important especially as we emerge out of the pandemic where those inequalities have been magnified. DMU's staff networks go a long way to supporting this within DMU I think. I believe it is important for both staff and students to be in an institution where they feel empowered not only to be themselves but to go for their aims within life. DMU does a lot of this through various careers related schemes it runs and the vast range of opportunities that it gives students and staff are supported via various schemes and the staff networks. I think if an institution can have the capability to empower every individual who interacts with it then it is very special indeed.

## **Mica Sbrljanin**

*Faculty Executive Project Officer, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences*



As Marsha. P. Johnson once said "you never completely have your rights, one person, until you all have your rights." The idea that a person is judged or vilified for who they love or how they identify has always seemed strange to me, and the fact that there are STILL laws in certain countries preventing people from being with the person that they choose seems even stranger.

I'm an LGBTQ+ ally and have always been an open, uninhibited person, and my outlook on life is "be who you want to be and do what makes you happy". Whilst at secondary school, I was the first person a good friend came out to before his family or friendship circle, at a time where there were no visibly "out" kids. I felt so privileged and honoured that he'd trusted me with those powerful words "I'm gay" and that simple act of listening changed his life, and gave me the spark to become a passionate and engaged ally. Flash forward fifteen years and several more friends have come out to me whether that being gay, bi, queer, pan and our lives have been all the richer for it.

University is a time where you can try out new or hidden identities to find out who you are. For me, sexuality is fluid and, in a world where it seems we are constantly ticking boxes, I think it's important for people to feel confident about ticking the box that best describes them at that moment in their lives, and to not to fear any judgement. We are so lucky to have a plethora of TV shows, celebrities and Instagram accounts showing the world what it is like to not be straight and, contrary to some people's opinions, the world has not gone to hell instead it is a brighter, happier and more inclusive place.

Whilst at DMU I have worked with the DSU's Equality and Diversity Executive and the LGBTQ+ Students Representative to update and edit our LGBTQ+ information page to support students who want to study or work abroad or participate in DMU Global overseas trips. All students should have the opportunity to participate in these impactful experiences regardless of their identity or sexual orientation, so providing relevant advice about the country they are visiting is so important. We've seen how countries such as Hungary, Russia and Poland are undoing decades of progress and despite the advances we have made in the UK we are still only ranked number 10 in the 2021 Rainbow Europe Map by International Lesbian and Gay Association.

We work at an educational institution so all I can say is educate yourself! The world would be a very boring place if we were all the same, so embrace the difference and the diversity and open up your world to drag, Pride and people who you didn't know were gay because they "didn't seem gay". For so long the world has been run by straight, white, cis men and look where that's got us! We all have the opportunity to amplify the voices of others, to use our platform and to call out inappropriate behaviour and discrimination. We all have the opportunity to initiate positive change, so take it!

## **Phillipa Steel**

*DMU Music Officer, Social Impact and Engagement*



### **Tell us about yourself?**

My name is Phillipa Steel and I joined DMU back in January 2019, as DMU Music Coordinator. Originally from Milton Keynes, I've slowly been making my way around the Midlands. As a pianist and singer, I studied music at the University of Nottingham. After graduating in 2014, I explored a variety of roles in and around the city, within the hospitality and entertainment industries, but realised my academic journey wasn't complete just yet. In 2015, I returned to University of Nottingham to study an MA in music.

It was during my MA course that I realised my fascination for the way music plays a part (excuse the pun) within power, social control and the way we see the world. This opened my eyes to a number of pathways within music, and helped me move forward in my career.

My current role as DMU Music Officer is centred around creating high quality, transformative musical experiences for our students, staff and community, and enables me to continue to be curious about the role of music in our lives and identity.

Outside of DMU, I continue to pursue my personal music ambitions. This has been a long, bumpy road, with crises of confidence, self-esteem and ongoing battles with performance anxiety. Lockdown 1.0 forced me to slow down and re-evaluate where I wanted to be, and so I began working on these deep-rooted challenges. One of my proudest, personal achievements is the release of my debut single, Hear Me Out in June 2021 ([listen here on Spotify](#)). Since then I've continued to put one foot in front of the other, creating more music and getting back out to performing so that I can share music with others.

### **Who are your role models?**

I am lucky to be surrounded by many amazing role models in my life, including family, friends, colleagues and those I admire from afar. For the purpose of this article, I must mention some super strong Steel women; Mum is a master communicator and leader, and my sister, now living on the other side of the world, exhibits courage on a daily basis. Another Mrs Steel, my Dad's mum, introduced my sister and me to the piano. I treasure memories of her playing whilst we sang along, and smiling with encouragement (or gritted teeth?) when I would just sit at the piano and note bash until something sounded OK-ish.

On the whole, a role model in my eyes is someone who works hard, speaks up for themselves and others, and remains true to their own identity. These are qualities that I strive to embody.

**What urgent changes do we need to see in the world?**

I find this a really tough question because it's difficult to pin down. For me personally, our mental health is amongst the top priorities. I think there has been some positive change toward breaking the stigma, and encouraging people to seek help when they need it, but there's a long way to go. I think one of the huge challenges is being able to recognise the warning signs earlier, so that we don't reach crisis point before seeking help. Particularly after so much loss, grief and significant change to what we knew as the "everyday", or even the "mundane", I wonder what impact, both short and long term, this has really had on our mental health.

**Why have you joined DMU Women?**

I was first introduced to the DMU Women network during my first couple of weeks at DMU. A colleague invited me to an event and arranged for me to be added to the mailing list. I was so grateful, having arrived at DMU just 6 days prior in cold, dark January, to connect with colleagues and to be welcomed in to a space where I could feel a sense of belonging. Since then, I have really valued this as a supportive space and also somewhere to go for inspiration.

## **Sarah Thomson**

*Director of Social Impact and Engagement*



I came out at school when I was studying for my A levels so I was never really in the closet it wasn't until I got to university that I realised this wasn't the case for everyone. When I was studying for my undergraduate degree I became very involved with the LGBT group at the university. I spent a lot of time with students who were just coming to realise that they were LGBT and often university is the first-time people tell someone about their sexuality. For most people this was a positive experience but I remember some students who found it very difficult. University at the turn of this century was the era for being involved in LGBT politics, in my opinion. During my time at university, I saw the beginning of the movement to repeal Section 28, to lower the age of consent to 16, to give adoption rights to gay couples and to see legislation that would give civil partnerships to LGBT people – it seemed like we marched every weekend and shouted from the rooftops that we wanted to be treated equally.

16 years on and I now work at a university and I see students on that same journey, understanding who they are and what their fit is in the world. University is a wonderful place to test out who you want to be and sexuality is just one part of that. I had a friend at university who came out and he said to me 'I think my mum will be more upset to learn that I now read the Guardian than the fact I am gay'. Being who you are is so important to living an authentic life but it will also make you better at what you do. People who can truly be themselves will perform better at their jobs, studies and in all of their relationships and that is why it is so important to see positive role models all around you, so that you can feel like you can be yourself, whoever that self is.

Since I have been at DMU I have been proud to have organised #DMUpride – an annual celebration of events and activities that celebrate the LGBT community on our campus and in our city. Events have included LGBT films and plays, guest lectures, conferences, talks and international visitors. This year we took a group of students on a #DMUglobal trip to see Pride in New York City and to work with local communities that support LGBT people.

The most interesting fact that I have found about coming out is that you never stop doing it. New jobs, new friends, new colleagues will always result in you needing to 'come out' I hope to inspire people to be proud to do that and for it not to be something that they fear or are ashamed of. I am proud to work for a university that allows us to be who we are.

## **Sophie Holder**

*Executive Officer to Deputy PVC for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*



My name is Sophie Holder and I still consider myself a newbie to life in Leicester, although I have been living in the city (or its outskirts) for the past two years. If we get the chance to talk, my accent will reveal my firm London roots.

I have the pleasure of being the new Executive Officer for Kaushika Patel in the EDI department. The main focus of my role is to assist and support the Race Equality Charter, Decolonising DMU and other projects that will place equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of DMU's work and relationships both now and in the future.

Previous to this role, I worked for an international development charity, managing the volunteering department. While HE is a new challenge, working with and for people who are marginalised within society has been the constant thread throughout my career.

Changing careers was at first a frightening endeavour but a friend used some probing questions to focus my career change trajectory. She asked:

- What are you passionate about?
- What are you trained in?
- Where can you gain knowledge or training?

The junction at which these answers overlapped, for me being an experience and desire to fight and speak for justice, eventually led me to the field of EDI.

I am also studying for my Masters in Black British History – so my post-work hours are equally busy! While finishing my first degree 10+ years ago, I always thought I would study for my Masters if the right course presented itself.

Last year, while re-evaluating my interests and possible next steps, I kept circling my identities as Black and British, two lived experiences that have deeply moulded the way I think and interact with the world. Additionally, having always been taught Black history from an African American perspective, I was eager to learn about the contribution that Black Britons have played in creating the modern world. I never thought my studies would lead me to another job, but this was the beauty of studying a topic I was passionate about, it produced an opportunity not previously envisioned!

### **Who are your role models?**

My role models tend to be women in creative careers, who have a theme of race and/or gender activism and justice imbued in their work:

- Editor, writer, author, tv host – Elaine Welteroth
- Actress, writer, director – Michaela Coel
- Journalist, author, presenter – Afua Hirsch
- Author, feminist – Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie
- Lecturer, author – Dr Christienna Fryar

**What urgent changes do we need to see in the world?**

One of the injustices ever present on my radar is race equality – or the lack thereof. As a Black woman, this is something I have always felt zealous about but the recent Sewell Report - calling Britain an example to other white population countries in regard to race - reinvigorated me once again!

I view DMU as an institution that doesn't deny current realities and I am grateful that our work in EDI seeks to make tangible difference for people who comprise the global majority. We are willing to ask the difficult questions and take actions that will begin to make necessary change and I am excited to be contributing to this cause in my new role.

**Roger Saunders**

*Associate Professor, Faculty of Business and Law*



My name is Roger Saunders. I'm white, middle class, male and heterosexual. My politics are liberal socialist and I think that affects my outlook on life more than anything else. I hate injustice, bullying and discrimination. I believe in equity and equality of opportunity for all. I'm also very aware that I have never been exposed to the hate and bigotry that large numbers of people experience every day because of their skin colour, ethnicity, sexuality or gender identification.

I believe that it is my responsibility to learn from and be guided by those people who face difficulties and discrimination and to that end I have always tried to be open and honest. I lived in a gay household when I was a student and met some wonderful people who helped me understand some of the differences of their lived experience. During my rugby career I also played occasional games for Birmingham Bulls RFC gay and inclusive rugby team (front rows are often in short supply).

I grew up in Plymouth where Black, Asian and minority ethnic people were few and far between so moving to Birmingham to attend university was a great introduction to a variety of cultural experiences. Since then, I have had the pleasure of teaching students from all over the world and I have done my best to encourage them to share their lived experience and to talk about their cultures. I have made every effort in my module paperwork and my time as a personal tutor to be helpful, supportive, encouraging and most recently have focused on decolonising my teaching materials.

The most important thing I've learned is that we never stop learning.

## **Zheng Wang**

*Associate Professor & Reader in Economics, Faculty of Business and Law*



I'm an armless economist working in Business and Law. The adjective 'armless' as a physical condition already puts me in a tiny minority category, and the even rarer combination of it with the profession 'economist' makes me probably the only one of the kind in the entire world.

Born and raised in China, I was no different from other children in the country, until at aged nine an electrocution accident took away my arms and a toe, and turned the life of my family - especially of my parents - completely upside down. It was from that moment I started a long journey of learning to regain independence in a harsh and often discriminatory environment towards disabled people. My dad refused the suggestion of sending me to a special school. Instead, he sent me back to the same school I had been going to before the accident, despite all sorts of difficulties I would face there. Looking back at this, I now think this is the first of many wise decisions he made for me. Being in the same school and playing with the same friends, I didn't feel any different from before, and I firmly believed I could still achieve whatever other friends could achieve.

But life wasn't always rosy for disabled people outside their small comfort zone. My dad kept telling me about the cruelty of society, and that I needed to learn to be as independent as I possibly could, as I wouldn't get any help from anybody including my own parents. His words stuck with me; even now I never stop moving on after the many achievements in my life and work, which I was told were beyond imagination for many other people. With great support and care from parents and years of practice, I mastered the skills I needed to be independent for daily tasks – writing with my mouth, typing with my toe, doing laundry with my feet, eating and dressing using a combination of multiple parts of my body, and even going to the tiny airline toilet cubical without needing help from other people.

The first cruelty of reality started to set in after my university entrance exams (equivalent to UK A-level exams). There were hardly any universities who wanted to accept me regardless of my outstanding grades, just because of my disability. One of the best universities in China even had one sentence in their admission policy saying explicitly that applicants without arms cannot be admitted. It was only after my dad's months of begging, appealing, and visiting different organisations that I was finally admitted by my first-choice university as an exception, which was already past the clearing window. However, the admission was on the condition that we wouldn't ask the university for any logistical or facility support such as an adjustment of university accommodation for accessibility.

At university, I discovered my interest in economics and wanted to pursue an academic career out of this interest. But university life wasn't just about getting a good grade, I found love too. However, the romance was short lived after I received a death threat from my then-girlfriend's father after he discovered our relationship. A daughter marrying an armless man was like a death penalty to the reputation of the entire family, and begging for love was the last thing I wanted, so I gave up. I had to move on, still hoping that one day I would be good enough to find love with blessings from everybody in the family.

I returned to my world of economics. I started doing a PhD at the same university, until I realised that to do more solid research I needed more rigorous training in a well-reputed programme. It didn't take me long to make one of the boldest decisions in my life - to apply to a UK PhD programme. I had no clues at all what barriers lay ahead if I chose to move abroad alone as an armless person. I didn't even think of bringing one of parents with me to the UK, not even for the initial settling period. I wanted to take on this challenge to make myself stronger and even more independent.

My experience in the UK was eye opening, life changing, and in stark contrast to what I had experienced in China, mostly in a very positive way. The support I received on campus and outside was totally beyond my expectation. It is without any question that without these supports - at both the institutional level and personal level - I wouldn't have been able to come this far. At the same time, I noticed a big cultural difference between China and the UK, which was people's attitude towards disability. It first seemed to me that in the UK disability wasn't something to be ashamed of and to be discriminated against when it came to study and work. Much as I enjoyed being seen as a person who's no different from undisable people, I began to realise one problem: people appear to have no interest in your physical conditions, and more so in recent years. My experience and reasoning now tells me this is partly because of the mannerism part of the UK culture, and partly because of the consciousness of being politically correct.

When people appear to be uninterested in your personal matters including your disability, why should you bother telling people about your stories? This said, for those people who are curious about things that happened to you but are just afraid or feel embarrassed to ask about them, it is a shame that I haven't been able to have any opportunity to open up my world to them. If I had, I believe I might have inspired some people especially our students who were experiencing similar difficulties and hardship in their life.

Having a platform for people to openly talk about their personal stories is important in an environment where political correctness is increasingly and worryingly institutionalised. Tolerance and inclusivity should not be equated to being quiet about those topics, but should be about encouraging people to be willing to exchange their real thoughts in a friendly and peaceful manner while accepting and respecting the differences among individuals. I'm more than happy to contribute to our DMU and the wider community in such a way.

**Zowie Davey**

*VC2020 Lecturer, Centre for LGBTQ+ Research and Division of Social Work, Faculty of Health and Life Sciences*



I started work as a senior lecturer on 1 September 2016 in the Centre for LGBTQ+ Research in the School of Applied Social Sciences.

My work centres on transgender embodiment and wider LGBTQ+ issues in education, politics and healthcare. DMU has supported my work through internal funding and I have been fully supported by an amazing line manager, team, research support staff (RBI) and finance staff. I have encountered an important LGBTQ+ friendly atmosphere and received much encouragement.

My often-marginalised research and trans identity has been encouraged from the very start of my encounter with senior academic staff at DMU in the interview, in all the meetings I have attended since and within chance get-togethers with other colleagues in and around the university.

Although I do not 'come-out' all the time and my 'passing privilege' is evident, I feel that if I happen to, in the course of any (research) meeting at DMU, this will be met with acceptance, as I feel many other forms of diversity are too. I also feel that if anybody does react in an inappropriate way towards me I would be able to pursue lines of rectification.