A message from the President and Vice-Chancellor

We are a University committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. As part of this commitment it gives me great pleasure to present to you three portraits of women who have made their mark on the University.

Whether through teaching, learning or representing our students, these women were trailblazers. And what makes this particularly special is that these paintings were created by three talented female painters.

I can think of no better way to celebrate International Women’s Day as we enter our centenary year than to celebrate the impact these women had on our institution.

Professor Paul Boyle,
President and Vice-Chancellor
Introducing the Portraits

These three portraits represent the realisation of a project long discussed. The paintings and portraits we hold record the history of our University and the preceding University College. As such, they represent not only historical facts but also historical values. We want our portraits to exemplify our aspirations to become an ever more diverse and inclusive University community.

In 2017, working with colleagues from Attenborough Arts, we commissioned three portraits of female ‘firsts’ at the University of Leicester, all to be painted by female artists. We received more than 50 applications from artists keen to be part of this historic change and are absolutely delighted with the three finished works, set to be unveiled as part of our week-long celebration of International Women’s Day in March 2018.

The art we display on campus matters; it is a mechanism by which we can express our values. This project represents and celebrates the diversity of our staff, students and wider contributors, by recognising pioneers whose achievements have challenged stereotypes and demonstrated that achievement and leadership has no boundaries of race or gender.

These portraits mark a place on our journey towards embedding a culture of equality, diversity and inclusivity throughout the University. We are very proud to welcome to the unveiling event one of our subjects, the families and colleagues of all three, and the artists who have captured them for future generations. As part of the event, some of our guests will talk about what this project means to them and why diversifying our visual landscape really matters.

Dr Kate Williams,
Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Equality and Diversity
Esuantsiwa
Jane Goldsmith

Painted by
MEGAN MCMULLAN

A portrait painter born in Leicester in 1989, Megan studied at De Montfort University where she achieved first class honours in her fine art degree and also gained a Masters the year after. After leaving university Megan joined Knighton Lane Artists so that she could continue with her artistic practice. Megan paints in a realist style creating the illusion that the sitter is there in person. She not only tries to capture the likeness but also the personality and warmth of the sitters. Megan currently works full time as a Porter at the University of Leicester.

“This is a brilliant project to be part of, not only helping to introduce a new portrait but also assisting to make the University of Leicester’s art collection more diverse.”

www.meganmcmullanartist.co.uk
“When I was President I had to go to Senate meetings, me with 90-odd white guys, so I always turned up wearing banana yellow and big hair to scare the mortar boards off them.”


When elected President of Leicester University Students’ Union in 1975, Jane scored a double first, being both the first female student* and the first black woman student to hold the office. ‘Students pick woman!’ was the headline in the Leicester Mercury that week.

Studying for a combined arts degree, Jane later admitted to being “your number one dungareed, dangly ear-ringed activist”. She served as President of the SU’s Women’s Liberation Group and Anti-Apartheid Group, as well as Vice-Chair of the Union, before being persuaded to stand for a Sabbatical position. Right from her first year at Leicester, she had been active in student politics, successfully proposing a motion of ‘This house is against sexism’ to censure the Rugby Club for their Rag Week activities.

Drawing on more than 30 years’ experience as an activist in women’s human rights worldwide, Jane is a consultant to over 100 different voluntary organisations nationally and internationally. Among many other positions, she has been Commissioner for the Women’s National Commission, Chair of the Fawcett Society, Chair and Co-Founder of the Gender and Development Network, Vice-Chair of ActionAid UK, a Trustee of the Equality and Diversity Forum and a member of the UK Government delegation to the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995. She was enstooled as Queen Mother of Development of her village in Cape Coast, Ghana, in 2009.

Jane was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws in 2015.

Jane now uses her Ghanaian name, Esuantsiwa – or Esua for short.

“Jane’s continuing involvement in the University reflects her commitment to using her own often difficult experiences to empower others, and to highlighting the history and leadership – too often told too quietly or not at all – of inspirational black women.”

Dr Holly Furneaux, Honorary Degree oration

* Due acknowledgement to Nellie Bonsor (1923-26) and C Edith Baseley (1936-37) who held the equivalent position in the days of University College, Leicester.
Olive Banks

(1923-2006)

Painted by

ELIZABETH EMMA TOOTH

Elizabeth Emma Tooth is a Derbyshire-based portrait artist with an outstanding catalogue of works to her name. Her work is featured in many public galleries and collections across the world including the UK, France, Iceland, Germany, North America and South Africa – and now the University of Leicester. She was delighted to be asked to produce a portrait to celebrate the role of women at the University and International Women’s Day – a cause naturally very close to her heart.

www.emmatooth.co.uk
In 1970, after a number of years at Liverpool University, Olive Banks was appointed as Reader in the Sociology Department at the University of Leicester. Three years later she was awarded a chair, becoming the University’s first female professor.

A graduate of LSE who had left school at 16, Olive concentrated on the new field of sociology of education, publishing her first book in 1955. Her 1965 textbook, simply called *The Sociology of Education*, cemented her position as an expert in the field and was instrumental in her successful appointment at Leicester.

As well as battling ingrained sexism within academia, Olive found herself pigeonholed into her chosen field and in 1975 made the bold decision to concentrate instead on the history of the burgeoning feminist movement. This led to her acclaimed 1981 work *Faces of Feminism*.

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Olive took early retirement the following year (reducing the number of female professors at Leicester to zero once again). Free of teaching commitments and disciplinary silos, she was able to take a more interdisciplinary approach to her feminist studies, producing important new works including the two-volume *Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists 1800-1945*. She passed away in 2006.

“Any attempt to raise feminist arguments was met with indifference if not outright hostility, and the paucity of women academics in general increased my feeling of isolation. It is perhaps in this respect that the situation for the academic who is a woman differs most strikingly today.”


“Olive had overcome the disadvantages of her class background and gender to become a leading scholar in two fields, despite the prejudices that women academics faced in higher education in Britain after the Second World War. But more than this, she was supportive of younger academic women, such as myself, and an important role model for many of us.”

Professor June Purvis, University of Portsmouth
‘Olive Banks: An Appreciation’.
Wendy Hickling
OBE, JP, DL
(1936-2017)

Painted by
REBECCA FOSTER
Rebecca Foster is a London based artist whose work is focused on contemporary portraiture. She studied at Central St Martins and was awarded an MA in Drawing from Wimbledon School of Art in 2006. She has exhibited internationally and her work is widely collected. Her recent solo show of portraits exploring modern masculinity was an overwhelming success and she is currently showing work in a group exhibition focused on female creativity.

“It was a privilege to be selected by Leicester University as one of the artists commissioned for International Women’s Day. The commission was of particular interest as it seeks to rebalance the representation of women in public spaces. As a female artist the opportunity to paint a subject chosen for her excellence and intelligence was an honour and I am delighted with the finished painting.”

www.rebeccafosterartist.com
In 1958, students who had spent three years studying at University College Leicester received their degrees in the first graduation ceremony of the newly established Leicester University. The impersonal vagary of alphabetical order dictated that Wendy Baldwin was first across the stage, becoming the University’s first ever graduate.

Under her married name of Hickling, Wendy was an integral part of the University throughout her life. She served on the University’s two main governing bodies, Council and Court, for more than 20 years and also for 16 years served on the Convocation (predecessor to the Alumni Association).

Her public service extended far beyond the University, including serving as Chair of three NHS Trusts, as a Justice of the Peace and as a Deputy Lieutenant of Leicestershire. Initially working as a teacher, Wendy ran a nursery school in Leicester for 25 years and also worked for Vista, the local charity supporting blind people.

In 1998, Wendy Hickling received an Honorary Doctorate of Laws and in 2008, on the fiftieth anniversary of her original graduation ceremony, she was named a Distinguished Honorary Fellow – the highest honour which the University can bestow. She passed away in May 2017, after a lifetime of devoted service to University and city.

“As the first student to graduate with a University of Leicester degree Wendy set a very high standard for the thousands who have followed.”

Bridget Towle, Chair of Council.

“In our rooms, with outstretched arms you could touch each wall. You were allowed five items on your dressing table and nothing on the radiator. If you contravened this rule your surplus items were confiscated and you had to pay to get them back.”

Wendy Hickling, 2008