

Biographies for Kent Honorary Graduands July 2022

Professor Abdulrazak Gurnah

Professor Abdulrazak Gurnah is a Nobel Prize winning novelist and Emeritus Professor at the University of Kent.

Abdulrazak was born in 1948 in Tanzania. He is the author of ten highly-acclaimed novels including *Memory of Departure*, *Pilgrim's Way*, *Dottie and Paradise*, which was shortlisted for the 1994 Man Booker Prize. The theme of the refugee's disruption runs throughout his work, reflecting his own cross-continental journey.

He won the 2021 Nobel Prize for Literature, with The Nobel Committee commending 'his uncompromising and compassionate penetration of the effects of colonialism and the fate of the refugee in the gulf between cultures and continents.'

The Nobel Committee noted: 'His stories, some of which were first drafted in the University's very own Templeman Library, have touched millions worldwide and shine a light on human experiences that are so often ignored.'

Abdulrazak's main academic interest is in postcolonial writing and in discourses associated with colonialism, especially as they relate to Africa, the Caribbean and India. He has edited two volumes of *Essays on African Writing*, has published articles on a number of contemporary postcolonial writers, including Naipaul, Rushdie and Zoe Wicomb. He is the editor of *A Companion to Salman Rushdie* (Cambridge University Press 2007).

Until his recent retirement, he was professor of English and Postcolonial Literatures in the Kent's School of English, having completed his PhD at Kent in 1982.



Susan Wanless

Susan Wanless was Director of Music at the University of Kent from 1987 up until her retirement in 2020.

Susan was born in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, and attended Scarborough Girls' High School and Sixth Form College. She went to the University of Leeds to read Music, researching leitmotif in the operas of Verdi and conducting University choirs, orchestras and ensembles.

Susan then spent seven years in Leeds as a freelance musician, conducting choirs and orchestras throughout Yorkshire and teaching at Leeds Grammar School and the University's Department of Adult Education. She also wrote a study guide to Richard Strauss' *Four Last Songs*.

In September 1987 Susan moved south to Canterbury to become the Director of Music at the University of Kent. She developed a programme of extra-curricular music-making for the students, staff and the local community, gradually establishing a chorus, symphony orchestra, concert band, chamber choir and many other ensembles. She also developed a very successful Music Scholarship Scheme which continues to attract many talented national and international students to Kent to pursue their musical talents whilst studying for their degree.

Susan was awarded The Barbara Morris Prize for Learning Support, in recognition of her contribution to music provision across the University. She was also Master of Eliot College from 1998 – 2001, providing support and welfare for the Eliot College student community. She has sat on a number of music competition panels and is on the Council of the Canterbury Festival, also chairing the judges for its Bursary Prize.



Dr Howard Leicester MBE

Dr Howard Leicester MBE is a researcher in the field of health informatics and a campaigner for accessible information.

While he works to make information accessible in many fields including academia, local government, publishing, politics and civic engagement, public agencies and utilities, he has a particular interest in the field of health and social care. He was awarded an MBE for his work in this field in the 2017 New Year Honours list.

Howard has a genetic condition leading to progressive sensory loss in both sight and hearing, which has driven his work. He is excited by the possibilities for true inclusion in a world of smart devices and pervasive media and keen to address the waste and injustice when a large part of the population - due to specific disabilities, sensory loss, dexterity challenges, poor literacy, learning difficulties, age or infirmity - is excluded from this information revolution at a very basic level.

He plays an advisory role on accessibility for a number of public and voluntary bodies, both as an informatics specialist and as a champion for the patient perspective. In that capacity he has made significant contributions to the NHS Accessible Information Standard and to the British Standards Institution's standard for web accessibility. He continues to campaign in this field.

He offers professional advice on these same issues and is a partner in developing RoboNHS – a simple software solution to translate NHS communications into accessible formats.

Professor Kevin Hylton

Professor Kevin Hylton is Interim Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Culture, Equality and Inclusion at the University of Sussex. He is also currently Chair of the Sheffield Race Equality Commission, Visiting Professor in Sport Integrity (MA) at Leuven University in Belgium and Emeritus Professor of Leeds Beckett University.

Kevin was born in London and grew up in Leeds. He went to Secondary Allerton Grange High School and Airedale and Wharfedale FE College before attending Trinity and All Saints College, where he gained a BA Honours in Physical Education and Business Administration. He went on to attend Leeds Metropolitan University, where he gained an MA in Leisure and Human Potential, a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Methodology and a PhD in Local Government 'Race' and Policy Implementation: Demystifying Equal Opportunities.

Kevin went on a Promising Researcher Fellowship Sabbatical from Leeds Metropolitan University in 2007, becoming a Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies at the University of Leeds. From 2008-2011 he was Reader in the Social Sciences of Sport, Leisure and PE at Leeds Metropolitan University. Kevin went on to be Professor of Equality and Diversity in Sport and Education, and Head of the Research Centre for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Leeds Beckett University from 2011-2019, before becoming Emeritus Professor in 2019. His other academic roles have included being Adjunct Professor Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia (2016) and Visiting Professor at University of South Wales (2019-present).

In other career highlights Kevin's 'Race' and Sport: Critical Race Theory was recommended by Routledge as *one of the top ten resources for teaching undergraduates to think critically about the role of sport in society* in 2009. He was included in the Leisure Studies Journal's 30 Year Anniversary of Most Significant Papers List in 2011 for his 2002 research paper 'Shades of White: an examination of whiteness in sport'. In 2015 he was included in the International Review for the Sociology of Sport's Top 10 articles over 50 years since establishment.

From 2016 to present, Kevin is Co-Editor of Routledge's Critical Perspectives Book Series, Equality and Social Justice.

To date, Kevin holds further influential roles as Patron of the Advance HE Race Equality Charter (since 2015), is a Senior Research Fellow for the World Educational Research Association (WERA), a member of African Diaspora-International Research Network (since 2018) and is Special Advisor, Sporting Equals Sport Monitoring Advisory Panel & Sporting Equals Charter (since 2019).



Mark Lane

Mark Lane is a UK TV gardening presenter, landscape designer and writer, best known for his regular appearances on *BBC Morning Live*, and BBC gardening programme *Gardeners' World*. He is the UK's first BBC gardening presenter who uses a wheelchair.

Mark was born in Hitchin, Hertfordshire, and grew up in Hove, East Sussex. He attended Blatchington Mill School, before going to University College London (UCL) where he attained a BA Honours in Art History and Diploma in Garden Design.

After graduating from UCL, his career led him to work at the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) where he eventually became Publishing Director. He then moved on to International Arts publisher Thames & Hudson as Managing Editor.

He retrained as a garden designer, and combined writing for gardening magazines with gardening itself. From here, his career with TV presenting began. As well as his presenting roles with the BBC, he is a regular presenter and interviewer for the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Flower Shows. He has also appeared on *Celebrity Mastermind* and *Pointless Celebrities*.

Mark also holds various voluntary roles. He is Patron for Core Landscapes (social and therapeutic horticulture for London charity community garden) and Trustee/Co-chair for the Gardening with Disabilities Trust. Mark holds ambassador roles for the following charities: Leonard Cheshire, Groundwork, Thrive, Greenfingers and Melanoma Fund. He is also Equity Ambassador for the British Association of Landscape Industries (BALI), aiming to improve the diversity within the horticultural and landscaping industries,

His most notable awards are: being named a finalist for Celebrity of the Year at the National Diversity Awards 2021, Best Landscape Architecture and Design Business 2022 (BUILD Architecture Awards), Best Residential Landscape Design Practice 2022 (Home & Garden), Best International Garden & Landscape Design Firm 2021 (Architecture Awards), Most Innovative Landscape Designer 2021 (Build magazine), Landscape Designer of the Year 2021 (Corporate Livewire Global Awards).

Mark is also Managing Director/Principal Director of Mark Lane Designs Ltd, an award-winning landscape design practice based in Kent.



Mark Thomas

Mark Thomas is an English comedian, presenter, political satirist and journalist from south London. He first became known as a guest comic on the BBC Radio 1 comedy show *The Mary Whitehouse Experience* in the late 1980s. He is best known for political stunts on his show, *The Mark Thomas Comedy Product* on Channel 4.

Born in south London, he attended Bretton Hall College where he obtained a degree in Theatre Arts. He is the author of five books and has been a columnist for the *New Statesman*.

Mark has had a long affiliation with the University of Kent, where he delivered the inaugural Linda Smith Lecture in 2015.

The Mark Thomas Collection forms part of the University's British Stand-Up Comedy Archive. The collection includes material related to Mark's early stand-up career on the comedy circuit in the 1980s and 1990s (mainly promotional material and press coverage) through to his later solo shows between 1996 and 2015, and includes audio-visual recordings, press and promotional material. The collection also contains material related to Mark's broadcasting career on television and radio in the 1990s and 2000s (which includes research materials, and audio-visual recordings), and also material related to his book and audio publications. There is also extensive material related to Mark's campaigning and activism work (some of which has informed his stand-up performance and television work), including campaigns involving arms and the arms trade, multinational corporations, and campaigns for civil liberties. This material includes press and publicity, correspondence, audio-visual recordings, notebooks and personal diaries, and photographs.



Dame Stephanie Shirley

Dame Stephanie Shirley CH, BSc, FEng, Distinguished Fellow and first woman President of the British Computer Society, is a workplace revolutionary, successful IT entrepreneur and ardent venture philanthropist. She was born in Dortmund, Germany and came to this country as an unaccompanied child refugee in 1939. She grew up with foster parents in the Midlands of England and went to secondary school in Oswestry on the Welsh border. She took a London honours degree in mathematics at night school.

In 1962, she founded an all-woman software company that pioneered remote working and redefined the expectations and opportunities for working women at that time. Her company, Freelance Programmers, grew to 8,500 employees, was ultimately valued at almost \$3 billion and made 70 of her staff into millionaires.

Since 'retiring', her focus has been on philanthropy, especially autism and IT. Over the last 30 years Dame Stephanie has given away almost £70 million – enough to take her out of The Times Rich List. She has brought to sustainability three significant autism charities which together employ approx. 1000 people - *Autistica*, *Prior's Court*, *Autism at Kingwood* and was the founding donor for the *Oxford Internet Institute*.

She was awarded the Mountbatten Medal by the Institute of Engineering and Technology in 1999, is a Past Master of the IT livery company, and in 2017 was appointed a Companion of Honour (CH) for her services to entrepreneurship and philanthropy – a membership limited to only 65 individuals in the world.



Olufunke Abimbola MBE

Professor Dr Funke Abimbola is a Corporate Lawyer, global Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Leader, C-suite and healthcare executive, BBC commentator, Non-Executive Director, Public Speaker, and podcast host.

She was born in Lagos, Nigeria and spent the first eight years of her life in Nigeria before relocating to the UK to continue her education. She now lives in the UK.

Professor Abimbola attended Burgess Hill Girls School before proceeding to Newcastle University where she studied law and obtained her law degree. Following that, she attended the Nigerian Law School where she qualified as a Barrister and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria before returning to the UK to complete the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (as it was then known) at BPP Law School. She was admitted as a solicitor in England and Wales in September 2000.

Professor Abimbola enjoyed 20-year corporate law career, working as a corporate lawyer in 4 different law firms over a 12-year period before joining Roche, the world's largest biotech company. During her seven years at Roche, she served in a number of roles including Managing Counsel, Data Protection Officer and Compliance Officer. When she left Roche in 2018, she was General Counsel and Head of Financial Compliance at Roche and the most senior black lawyer working in the UK's pharmaceutical industry. Following her time at Roche, Professor Abimbola joined Cycle Pharmaceuticals as Global General Counsel.

Alongside her full-time roles, Professor Abimbola has devoted a substantial amount of her spare time to improving diversity and inclusion across the legal profession and the wider business world through a range of initiatives focusing on a number of different diversity strands. Her work has involved partnering with UK Central Government, the Law Society, well-known charities and other notable organisations.

In September 2020, Professor Abimbola founded The Austen Bronte Consultancy. The consultancy's main goal is to drive positive cultural change across the business world by leveraging the positive impact of diversity, inclusion, belonging and equity.

Funke's leadership and influence have been recognised by the Financial Times and the UK's Prime Minister. She was awarded an MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's 2017 birthday honours list for services to diversity and young people, recognising her contributions in leading on the diversity and inclusion agenda for over a decade.



Tiwa Savage

Tiwa Savage is an award-winning singer-songwriter and Afrobeats star. She is best known for her hit singles such as 'Mr Lova Lova' ft Duncan Mighty, 'Diet' and 'Tiwa's Vibe' all reaching the No. 1 spot across charts all over Africa and securing her position as one of Afrobeats' leading artists. In 2019, she signed an exclusive recording contract with Universal Records and released her first global single titled '49-99' under Motown Records.

In November 2018, Tiwa was crowned Best African Act by the MTV European Music Awards and made history as the first female to win the accolade. In the same year, Tiwa became the first African female to sell out London's IndigO2 and was handpicked by Coldplay's Chris Martin to perform alongside Beyonce, Ed Sheeran and Jay Z live at the Global Citizen Festival in Johannesburg.

Tiwa was born in Lagos, Nigeria where she lived until the age of 11 when her parents decided to move to London. At the age of 16 she sang backing vocals for George Michael. Tiwa quickly found further work over the years with the likes of Mary J. Blige, Kelly Clarkson, Emma Bunton and Blu Cantrell.

Tiwa completed a degree in Business Administration at the University of Kent before she won a scholarship to study Professional Music at the Berklee College of Music in Boston.

Tiwa moved to New York City where she was signed to Sony/ATV as a writer. She then moved to Los Angeles and created songs which would eventually go on to find placements with Mya, Monica, Kat DeLuna and Whitney Houston.

Inspired and stimulated by the lack of true female superstars in her home country, she moved back to Nigeria and set up her own label imprint 323 Entertainment with Tunji "TJ Billz" Balogun, which soon joined forces with Mavin Records label. She released 'Kele Kele Love' as her debut single to widespread critical acclaim. Her debut album 'Once Upon A Time' was released in July 2013.

Away from her successes in music, Tiwa co-hosted the second season of Nigerian Idol in 2011, appeared in the stage version of 'For Coloured Girls' and appeared in MTV's Shuga.

Tiwa has also been active in her philanthropic endeavours, supporting various youth engagement organisations and breast cancer screening projects across Nigeria and further afield. Tiwa was named one of the world's top 100 inspirational women in fashion for Vogue magazine and graced the cover of Billboard Magazine's first issue devoted entirely to Africa.



Kush Kanodia

Kush is a disability rights and race equality champion, a multiple award-winning social entrepreneur and a systems leader. Kush creates systemic change for the inclusion of disabled people focusing on the intersection of disability with his portfolio career.

He is advisor to the world's first Global Disability Innovation Hub and the world's first WHO (World Health Organisation) collaboration centre on assistive technology with UCL, Associate non-executive director with Hertfordshire NHS Foundation Trust, and Trustee and Director at AbilityNet. He is also Trustee and Director at the Centre for Access to Football in Europe, Intersectional advisory board member for Inclusion London (supporting Deaf and Disabled people's organisations in London) and Ambassador for Disability Rights UK.

Kush graduated with a BSc in Management Science and achieved a Master of Business Administration (MBA) with Distinction Honours from the University of Kent.

Previously, Kush has worked with some of the largest and most influential organisations from the BBC, HSBC, and the NHS to Bloomberg, Lehman Brother and Morgan Stanley. In 2009, Kush left a successful career as an investment banker to focus on disability inclusion, co-founding the global diversity non-governmental organisation Choice International.

Kush was a Torch Bearer for the Paralympic Games in London 2012. He was selected for his dedication to disability rights and his inspirational career. In 2018, Kush was cited as one of the top ten most influential BAME leaders in technology by the Financial Times. In 2019, he received the Asian Achievers Award for Entrepreneur of the Year, was included in the BAME 100 Business Leaders Index by Green Park, and he received the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award by TiE London. Kush was ranked second in the Disability Power 100, Shaw Trust list of most powerful and influential disabled people in the UK.

As a Level Playing Field Trustee, Kush helped to gain a commitment from all Premier League football clubs to comply with accessibility guidelines of UEFA and Centre for Access to Football in Europe. In 2021, Kush led the #NoWheelChairTax campaign to success. Transforming the largest health system in the world - NHS England. Abolishing all disabled car parking charges from 206 NHS hospital trusts, helping 2.5 million disabled people with a Blue Badge to access critical healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kush also persuaded the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea to simplify and expand free disabled parking from approximately one to four hours for three of the leading NHS hospitals in the country.

