

The Honorary Graduand: Penny Gane

The Orator: Professor Jane Harrington

Penny Gane is to be awarded the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

Penny was born into a Bristol family of furniture makers, known for commissioning the architect Marcel Breuer to design modernist furniture. When the family business closed after the war her immediate family hit hard times and Penny later won a free scholarship to the Red Maids' School which was a charity school at that time. Girls cleaned the classrooms before breakfast, slept in large cold dormitories and wore starched white pinafores over their red woollen uniforms. Beyond the school gates the Swinging Sixties were happening.

Penny studied English and Latin Literature to Masters level at university and gained a teaching qualification. Her first job however, was in a residential hostel for troubled teenage girls in a tough area of Newcastle on Tyne. She returned to Bristol in 1976 and spent ten years teaching secondary school English and Drama.

After a career break to have children she joined Bristol City Council. Over the following twelve years she set up Bristol's centre for sustainable development, CREATE, was a District Director leading on environment and community safety, and established and managed the Bristol Partnership to develop Bristol's Community Strategy.

She then moved on to become Director of Public Private Partnerships with the Tribal Group developing large scale projects in Health and Education across the country. She subsequently co-founded a consultancy in equalities and human rights, building on the work she had developed with the Bristol Partnership and which aligned with long held beliefs in social justice. She also trained to be an executive coach and mentor.

During this time Penny acted as a non-executive director with NHS Bristol, chairing the Equalities Strategy Group and leading on Patient and Public Involvement. After this she became a board member of EME, a funding body of the Medical Research Council where she had responsibility for Patient and Public Involvement and was able to influence funding decisions by putting patients at the forefront of considerations.

Her consultancy was commissioned to establish a network of women in Bristol able to influence decision makers and tackle gender inequality. Working with women to establish Bristol Women's Voice, she was herself elected to its chair a year later, a position she has held for three years. The membership has grown to two thousand and become an influential voice in the running of the city.

She and others persuaded the elected Mayor of Bristol to sign the European Charter of Equality of Women and Men in Local Life and he in turn proposed setting up a Women's Commission which Penny was appointed to chair. The Commission has developed initiatives including the Zero Tolerance Campaign and 50-50 Women's Representation. It is now a standing commission of the Council. Bristol remains the only UK signatory to the charter.

Penny was invited to become a Fellow of the Royal Society for Arts in 2015 in recognition of her 'outstanding work for women's equality'.

For relaxation and exhilaration Penny sings in a small chamber choir. She also tackles the Guardian cryptic crossword and reads voraciously.

The Honorary Degree is awarded in recognition of Penny Gane's commitment to inclusivity and equality.