School of Mathematical, Physical, and Computational Sciences
Equality and Diversity Newsletter

We hope you are all enjoying a glorious summer. If you have a quiet moment, please have a read of this, our latest edition of the newsletter. You can also find more details about us at the SMPCS E&D webpage:

http://www.smps.reading.ac.uk/equality-diversity/

If you want any further information or there is anything you would like to raise please email Joy Singarayer (j.s.singarayer@reading.ac.uk) or Calvin Smith (calvin.smith@reading.ac.uk).

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1. Brexit and inclusivity
By Robin Smith

It’s easy to feel that the EU referendum in June, and the months of campaigning that led up to it, reflects a fundamental, inward-looking shift in the national mood. It might appear that, as a country, Britain has become, on average, less welcoming to non-UK nationals and the diverse contributions that they make in our society. In our University environment, where significant proportions of both staff and students come from other countries (not just the EU, of course) and collaboration with others across the world is a mainstay of how we work, it is difficult to see the referendum result in a positive light.

Whatever the national-level interpretation of the results is, there’s no such thing as a national-level voter. There was significant regional variation in the results, and different people voted for Leave or Remain for a host of different reasons. The campaigning before and the media storm after, however, have painted matters with exaggerated brush-strokes and been hugely divisive. In such circumstances, it is of vital importance that we consciously attempt to treat each other – both inside the University and outside, as equal individuals, without prejudice, whatever our backgrounds and apparent differences.
Despite the feeling that our international status has been transformed overnight, the UK has not actually left the EU yet. Or, in fact, done anything definite in that direction. At the moment, the impacts of the Leave vote are not coming from the implementation of any policy, but simply from the uncertainty of not knowing what the policies will be. The University has made statements at every level stressing its ongoing support of international staff and students, but the referendum has highlighted the degree to which the University can be impacted by events beyond its control in the outside world. Our lack of isolation can be made to work in both directions, however. If our School, and the University as a whole, can continue to demonstrate the benefits of implementing values of Equality and Diversity we can act as an effective example to those outside who might think that the country is better off putting up barriers rather than building bridges.

For further information and FAQs, including points of contact for queries relating to impacts of the referendum see the following link:
https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/staffportal/news/articles/spsn-681349.aspx

2. Our project on Black and Minority Ethnic student attainment

There is a UK wide attainment gap between Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students and white students. The degree of BME under-attainment varies between institutions and subjects, and remains even when any differences in entry qualifications are accounted for. These factors suggest that the gap likely results in part from teaching and assessment practices. However, there are open research questions as to what aspects may contribute. The School of Mathematical and Physical Sciences displays this pattern of ethnic minority under-attainment in taught degrees. In order to get a better picture of our own teaching practices and attainment we have set up a UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Project) summer placement to investigate further. The project is currently underway and led by Joy Singarayer, Calvin Smith, and Sally Lloyd-Evans in conjunction with a student from Psychology. We are combining basic statistical analysis of module assessment results, information on module teaching and assessment methods, and semi-structured interviews with staff and students. We will examine questions of: how effective different teaching styles/methods (e.g. group practicals, lectures, tutorials), when in the student journey the gap develops, and how the awareness of the teaching staff in BME issues influences attainment. This research is important to enhance inclusivity and equality for all in our School. We hope you too are interested in this and we would value your input when we carry out the interviews and surveys. If you would like to contribute to the project, please contact Joy Singarayer (j.s.singarayer@reading.ac.uk).
3. Conference funds for carers

Attending conferences for vital dissemination of research, networking, and career enhancement can be difficult for those with caring responsibilities, partly due to the extra costs involved. We would like to highlight a couple of sources of funding to assist with these costs, where the costs are not eligible for reimbursement via expenses through the university.

The Institute of Physics offers its members grants of up to £250 for the costs associated with additional care, e.g. extended hours for a childminder/care worker, or travel expenses for friends or relatives to come to you to look after dependents. [http://www.iop.org/about/grants/carers/page_56789.html](http://www.iop.org/about/grants/carers/page_56789.html)

The London Mathematical Society has recently set up a Carers Supplementary Grant of up to £200. Any mathematician in the UK is eligible to apply for a grant. If the applicant is not a member then an LMS member must countersign the application. The next deadline for applications is 15 September 2016. [https://www.lms.ac.uk/grants/caring-supplementary-grants](https://www.lms.ac.uk/grants/caring-supplementary-grants)

4. Academic citizenship in promotions criteria

To all staff thinking about promotion, the new criteria for associate professor and professor are now online at: [https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/WorkingatReading/RewardandBenefits/humres-academicpromotions.aspx](https://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/WorkingatReading/RewardandBenefits/humres-academicpromotions.aspx).

‘Academic Citizenship’ forms a key component of these criteria; demonstrating commitment to values of working together and professional behaviours. Examples of evidence of ‘Academic Citizenship’ given in the document include contributions towards achieving diversity and inclusion targets or active involvement in staff networks such as Women@Reading and LGBT+. Recognition of the value of such activities to the University is important, and rather cheekily we hope that this is food for thought when we put out our next advert to recruit new members to our Equality and Diversity Committee in October!

5. Mental health support

By Chris Holloway

Specific learning difficulties make up the largest percentage of registered student disabilities in the University. However, another significant source of difficulty for many students and staff involves mental health issues, which can range from long-term disability to short term struggles. Support for students with mental health concerns can be found at the newly renamed University Counselling & Wellbeing service based in the Carrington...
building (http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/counselling/cou-home.aspx). The University strongly recommends that students see a counsellor as early as possible when issues first arise, since this is more beneficial in the long run and can also allow for more straightforward justification for extenuating circumstances extensions. Staff members should use the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) with First Assist, which offers both phone counselling and face-to-face counselling services (http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/counselling/appointments/cou-staffappointments.aspx). The University also runs courses on how to provide “first aid” for mental health issues to friends, colleagues, or tutees. It is important to remember that, while most of us are not counsellors and should not attempt to diagnose or treat mental health conditions, we can follow simple steps such as assessing for signs of immediate risk, listening nonjudgmentally, and providing information about resources for both professional support and self-help (e.g., see http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/take-a-course/what-you-learn/).

6. Dyslexic Academic Network

The Dyslexic Academic Network (DAN) has been set up by the University of Kent. It is a support, advocacy, information, and policy development forum for researchers and lecturers with dyslexia. They highlight that dyslexics are dispersed across the country, often isolated, difficult to reach, and many are ‘hidden’ (read one academic’s personal account of this in The Guardian). This new network is the first ever opportunity for dyslexic academics to work together in identifying the challenges they face, ways of overcoming barriers, and to re-address the deficit model of dyslexia by exploring the many advantages of dyslexia, e.g. abstract thinking and creativity, heterogenic and multi-paradigmatic thought processing, and making unexpected links. The network can be found on Facebook at the link below, and there is an email address there to contact the network organizers and get involved.


https://creativedyslexicthinking.wordpress.com/about/


Image: Vince Low/ Grey Worldwide – Malaysia