School of Mathematics and Physical Sciences
Equality and Diversity Newsletter

Welcome back to everyone this chilly Spring Term. We hope you all had a cosy and restful break. This is the third newsletter of the School’s Equality and Diversity Committee. We are the committee seeking to improve the working environment for everyone and promote equality, diversity, and inclusion for all. You can find more details about us in our recently revamped webpage:

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

Our activities and other items of interest are also outlined in this quarterly newsletter.

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. Seminar on School E&D progress

Calvin Smith and Joy Singarayer will be delivering a seminar to report the Equality and Diversity committee’s progress now that it has been running for one year. Staff and students from Meteorology and Mathematics are welcome to come along. The seminar is at 1pm on Tuesday 22nd March 2016 in the main Meteorology Building lecture theatre GU01. We encourage as many people to come as possible as we also want to hear from you about what you would like to see happen in the School.

2. Paddy Woodman to talk on the BME attainment gap

Paddy will be giving a talk at the Meteorology department weekly staff meeting, but this meeting will be open to all teaching staff across the School. She will be discussing findings concerning the ‘attainment gap’ of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students across the University and our
School, as well as how we might take steps as lecturers towards addressing this issue. The talk will be on **Thursday 10th March at 1pm** in the main Meteorology Building room 1L61.

Paddy is the Director of Student Development and Access in the University and holds a National Teaching Fellowship in the Higher Education Academy. Her professional career has been devoted to creating life-wide learning opportunities for students, academic colleagues and the community. She introduced the University’s first employability/skills award: the Reading Experience and Development (RED) Award. Paddy has a strong and pro-active commitment to diversity and inclusion and has implemented a substantial programme of measures to enhance social mobility.


### 3. Small ways to improve our work culture: emails

Do you feel that you spend too much time answering emails? That you always have to have your email open in case something urgent comes in? Do you feel you have to respond to email even out of work hours? It can feel like email controls us and potentially reduces our productivity, as well as interfering with our personal lives and pursuits. As a school we can improve our email culture with some very small changes. As an action in our Athena SWAN resubmission plan, endorsed by our previous and current Head of School, to improve our work culture:

- You are all encouraged to **add availability statements to emails**. Once people realize that you do not respond to email out of hours they are less likely to send you emails out of your working hours, so you won’t need to check your emails so often!
• Promote a culture where it is okay not to respond to emails in the evenings and at weekends.
• If you are a supervisor, line manager, or similar, think about when you send emails to your students and group. You may like to work in the evening but sending many emails late at night over time may send a message that they should be working too or at least checking emails. Consider drafting your email when it is convenient for you and then sending it in the morning rather than at 11.56pm...
• Only check your email 5 times a day and turn it off in between! That way you can spend decent chunks of time with your attention on your work uninterrupted.
• Try not to send urgent emails but use the phone or face-to-face contact. We know this is not always possible, especially as we encourage flexible working. However, sending urgent emails trains us all to compulsively check our inboxes. Also, we risk not getting a response in time.
• Think about the number of people you are copying in to your email, and whether they all really need to receive your email – so we might all have fewer emails to deal with at the end of the day.
• …Of course, I (Joy) will acknowledge the irony when I email this newsletter out to everyone in the school...

4. Release your inner quiet: introversion and inclusion

Not standard fodder for an equality and diversity newsletter perhaps, but personality type can also have a big influence on inclusion and opportunity. The subject was brought to the attention of the committee by one of our members, Hannah Gough, after a teaching course, and following discussion at our committee we plan to develop resources on this.

Extroverts draw their energy from social interaction, are often outspoken and gregarious, and think aloud. Introverts draw energy from their inner world and often find social interactions draining, needing time alone to recharge their energy. Many introverts become great public speakers, performers, or leaders, but they tend to favour different kinds of social interactions to extroverts. We all lie somewhere on a spectrum between these two, with ambiverts in the middle.

It can feel as if extroversion is something society says we should all aim for, despite the fact that introverts (not to be confused with being shy or anti-social) make up around a third to a half of the population. This penchant for extroversion can heavily influence our recruitment decisions, career progression, opportunities for research collaboration, and the design of our workplace structures. Our teaching methods are also becoming more
interactive, with some element of class discussion in many modules. There is, though, little to link extroversion to academic or leadership ability. It may also be possible that such methods can lead to cultural disadvantages, since some cultures connect learning with introspection (e.g. Kim, Heejung. “We Talk, Therefore We Think? A Cultural Analysis of the Effect of Talking on Thinking.” Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 83 (2002): 828–42).

Introverts have as much to give and different perspectives to share, and it is worth thinking about how we approach work interactions to make the most of everyone’s abilities. For example:

- One-to-one face time – introverts often prefer individual meetings to voice their ideas and opinions instead of group meetings.
- If you are arranging meetings, let the group know what questions you want their thoughts on beforehand so everyone has a chance to formulate their ideas – beneficial to introverts, extroverts, and anyone who has English as a second language etc.
- As an alternative or addition to class discussion, include possibilities to interact with students via Blackboard or a Facebook group to enable people to contribute who might not volunteer to speak in class.
- Enable those in noisy shared or open-plan offices to find a quiet space to re-energize during the day

For anyone interested in this topic, the TED talk by Susan Cain (https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts?language=en) and the Quiet Revolution website (http://www.quietrev.com) are good for starters. The related book by Cain, called ‘Quiet: the power of introverts in a world that can’t stop talking’, has been kindly donated by one of our members, Eunice Lo (thanks Eunice!), and will be available in the common room for people to browse through (please return it to the common room if you take it elsewhere).

5. Webpage case studies

Over the last couple of months our ‘web presence’ sub-group have spent a bit of time and effort to update the School’s Equality and Diversity webpage: http://www.smps.reading.ac.uk/equality-diversity/

Many thanks to Stephen Burt for all his help developing this and in the face of the webserver crash in December.

On the webpage we now have case studies and examples of staff and student experiences of working flexibly or taking parental leave. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to write about their experiences and to let us share them on the website (with their photo): Jochen Broecker, Jon Blower, Hannah Prior, Danica Vucadinovic Greetham, Dan Hodson, Natalie Harvey, Gerrit Holl, Clare Smith, Mohammad Al Azah, Ellie Highwood, Chantal Muffit, Andrew Charlton-Perez, Bob Plant, Dawn Turner, Marguerite Gascoine, Claire Ryder, Sanita Vetra-Carvalho, Debbie Clifford.
We would like to broaden our webpage case studies to cover wider experiences in the school with regard to diversity and inclusion. **If you have any experience you would like to share as staff or student please contact Joy Singarayer, Calvin Smith, or Marguerite Gascoine.**

6. **Ellie Highwood blogs on diversifying the curriculum**

One of our University Deans for Diversity and Inclusion, Professor Ellie Highwood, has taken time to blog about a recent Teaching and Learning Showcase on diversifying the curriculum. Her post begins:

“**The one thing we all want to do is to engage our students**”.

So began the Teaching and Learning Showcase on Diversifying the Curriculum that I attended at Reading yesterday. If my experience of this showcase of 5 different curriculum development projects across campus is anything to go by, the speakers know a lot about engaging students. Personal experience tells us that we learn more when we are engaged, and we engage when we can identify with what we are seeing, hearing and reading. Thus the recognition that diversifying our curriculum in terms of race and ethnicity is a natural conclusion in the light of the much publicised BME attainment gap...

Ellie’s full blog post can be found at: [https://elliehighwood.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/getting-engaged-via-a-diverse-curriculum/](https://elliehighwood.wordpress.com/2016/01/19/getting-engaged-via-a-diverse-curriculum/)

7. **LGBT+ STEMinar**

Recently Professor Chandler-Wilde and Calvin Smith attended the inaugural meeting of the LGBT+ STEM community hosted at the University of Sheffield. This meeting, called the LGBT+ STEMinar, enabled LGBT+ scientists to showcase their work and to discuss issues related to this hidden diversity. For a flavour of what was discussed the plenary talk was videoed and is available here [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p937rh2xBY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8p937rh2xBY) and there was much discussion on the hashtag #LGBTSTEMinar.

8. **A note on positive discrimination**

Positive discrimination, that is giving preferential treatment to historically disadvantaged groups during the recruitment process regardless of ability, is not allowed under UK law. However, **positive action** is allowed such that an employer can encourage people from disadvantaged groups to apply for work and can provide training to help them for the particular work ahead. Recruitment decisions must be made on merit alone, except in circumstances where the candidates are "as qualified as" each other ([http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/employment/applying-job/positive-action-and-recruitment](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/employment/applying-job/positive-action-and-recruitment)). The assumption that certain historically disadvantaged groups are receiving preferential treatment and opportunities
over others can also create resentment in those who feel they are then not as fully supported, and this may have a detrimental impact on inclusivity. In our work as a committee we seek to develop policies and practices that are accessible and of benefit to all. For example, the development of mentoring for staff as part of our Athena SWAN application is available to anyone (with any gender identity) and with respect to any aspect of their professional development that is relevant to them, which could be dealing with developing as a research leader, balancing family life and academia, developing as an effective teacher, or anything else relevant.