School of Mathematics and Physical Sciences
Equality and Diversity Newsletter

This is the first newsletter of the School’s Equality and Diversity Committee. You are forgiven if you didn’t know that the School had one! We are a relatively new committee seeking to promote practices and policies within the School that improve equality, diversity, and inclusion for all. The committee consists of student and staff members from across Mathematics and Statistics and Meteorology departments. We will be highlighting activities, issues, and wider interest pieces in a quarterly newsletter. We realize that everyone is busy so we aim to keep the content brief enough to glance through over tea/coffee...

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. Shared Parental Leave

Hooray for parents! As of 5th April 2015 shared parental leave is open to parents whose baby is due, or who have a child matched or placed for adoption. Eligible parents of children born or adopted after this date will be entitled to Shared Parental Leave and Statutory Shared Parental Pay. It must be taken between the baby’s birth and first birthday, or within one year of adoption. Eligible parents can share up to 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay, after an initial two weeks of leave that is compulsory for the mother to take. Shared parental leave can be taken in one block, or split into blocks with periods of work in between. For more info: https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/shared-parental-leave

Parental leave — how will you share yours?
You could both take 25 weeks at the same time, or one parent takes the first 12 weeks and the other the following 38 weeks, or both take the first 6 weeks and then one parent continues to take another 38 weeks... there are so many possibilities!
2. Students with parental responsibilities

The new policy relating to students with parental responsibilities has been published and is in effect. The purpose of this document (link below) is to ensure that students at the University of Reading know where to seek advice about their health during pregnancy, the health of their child, and the management of the future course of study for new mothers and fathers. For more information see: http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/cqsd/Studentparentalpolicy.pdf

3. BAME conference

A BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) conference is scheduled to take place on Monday 1st June, 1-3/4pm. The conference will showcase best practice in the sector on how to tackle the attainment gap. The event’s aim is to raise awareness of BAME attainment to students and staff, and to share what other institutions are doing to tackle the issues that BAME students face. There will be a few presentations from speakers who have addressed the issue on the attainment gap and the exclusive nature of the HEIs curriculum. These include:

- Deborah Gabriel (Founder and CEO of Black British Academics)
- Helen Barefoot (University of Hertfordshire)
- Malia Bouattia (NUS Black Students’ Officer) TBC
- Swansea Students’ Union
- ACS Society
- Local FE colleges have been contacted to deliver a speech

Please contact educationofficer@rusu.co.uk for details and to book a place. The event will be filmed by RU:ON so if you are unable to attend they hope to have a video uploaded after the event.

4. ‘Ask the Board’ event

Each term, University Executive Board members invite all employees to join them for an update on the latest activity and plans across the University. These events are designed to give people the opportunity to hear a brief introduction about what's happening and the rest of the event is opened up for attendees to ask questions of the senior team about any topic. The termly ‘Ask the Board’ sessions run this week. The focus will be on diversity and inclusion and the Vice-Chancellor has written a message to all-staff, which is now on the staff portal. You can read the Vice-Chancellor’s message here and the details of the sessions are below:

- 20 May 10:00–10:50 National Grid, Greenlands
- 20 May 13:00–13:50 G11, Henley Business School, Whiteknights
- 21 May 13:00–13:50 LO22 G01, London Road
Please come if you can, and encourage your colleagues to attend. People can also send in questions ahead of time if they prefer by emailing communications@reading.ac.uk.

5. Considering unintended bias when writing reference letters

A recent editorial in Science by Marcia McNutt (Editor in Chief) highlights the potential for unintended bias in letters of reference for people applying for fellowships, grants, positions etc. Writing specifically about unconscious gender bias she found from her own recent experience of reviewing grant proposals that, ‘In some letters, women were described as “friendly,” “kind,” “pleasant,” “humble,” and frequently, “nice.”’… ‘Very different words were used to describe the male candidates (and many of the females as well): “brilliant,” “creative,” “hard-working,” “insightful,” and “showing leadership.”’ She notes that men and women were equally likely to use gender bias when writing references.

Similar bias has also recently been found in student evaluations of their professors, as well as in the peer-review process. While being able to work well within a team (being ‘nice’) is an often sought trait and some knowledge of personal characteristics and situations is helpful, it is worth taking a second look over letters of recommendation before sending them to make sure any unintended bias, however well-meaning, is reduced.

The short article can be found here: http://www.sciencemag.org/content/348/6235/611.full?utm_campaign=email-sci-toc&utm_src=email

6. Celebrating success: promotion while working flexibly

We would like to congratulate everyone who was successful in the recent round of promotions within the School. We would like to highlight that the School is supportive of staff working flexibly, and that it should not be a barrier to promotion. A great example is Dr Emily Black, who has just been promoted to Associate Professor within Meteorology. Emily works full time but from home two days a week in order to fit in childcare responsibilities. She is the director of the TAMSAT programme (Tropical Applications of Meteorology using SATellite data) and leads several other international research projects.

Other examples of staff (male and female) working flexibly for various reasons can be found on the Met Equality and Diversity webpage (http://www.met.reading.ac.uk/equality/)