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

Today is International Women’s Day, which feels like an appropriate day to put out an Equality and Diversity newsletter. This is a (roughly) termly 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 also find more details about us at the SMPCS E&D webpage: 
http://www.smps.reading.ac.uk/equality-and-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. International Women’s day related events

The theme for International Women’s Day 2017 is #BeBoldForChange: Each one of us - with women, men and non-binary people joining forces - can be a leader within our own spheres of influence by taking bold pragmatic action to accelerate gender parity.

There are several related events taking place this week:

• Wednesday 8th March, 1-2pm, Miller Building, G05. Chrissi McCarthy, founder and managing director of Constructing Equality. Chrissi will speak about the gender balance issues that face STEM professions
(with a focus on built environment professions), the benefits of greater gender balance, and the role both men and women can play in strengthening the sector.

• Wednesday 8th March, 6-8pm, Palmer, G02. An evening of discussion and debate: Dr Madeleine Davies from the Department of English will host the evening – with Professor Clare Furneaux talking about women and language; Dr Orla Kennedy talking about women and weight; Dr Brian Feltham, discussing the internalization of harassment and discrimination; Professor Rachel McCrindle discussing women in male dominated industries such as Engineering; and, Dr Mary Morrissey analysing the construction of Hillary Clinton in the recent US election campaign.

• Wednesday 8th March, 6.15pm, Minghella Cinema. Screening of ‘Under the Shadow’, a film about how politics, corruption and impunity are affecting the lives of women, men and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Followed by panel discussion.

• Friday 10th March, 1-2pm, Meadow Suite, Park house. Edith Morley Lecture by Penny Mordaunt MP, appointed Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, and University of Reading alum. Penny has had a successful career in business and communications – working in the private, public and charitable sectors. This event will also celebrate the renaming of the HUMMS building after Edith Morley herself. Register here to attend: http://www.reading.ac.uk/15/about/newsandevents/Events/Event712009.aspx

2. University Athena SWAN update

By Simon Chandler-Wilde (joint Dean of Diversity)

Following our submission at the end of April the University has a bronze Athena SWAN award. This was the first key milestone on our to do list when Ellie and I were appointed on 1 August last year to the new Dean for Diversity and Inclusion role.

Just like the School-level application currently in preparation for SMPCS, the submission is part self-reflection - on data, on a survey carried out of STEM staff, and on the results of several follow-up focus group - part reporting on
actions and their effect, and part preparation of a new action plan for the period 2016-19. All this is led by a University Self-Assessment Team (SAT), with staff at a variety of career stages and with a variety of experiences, from PVC level to early postdoc/RUSU representation.

Achievements over the last few years that we reported on in the submission included improvements in % of female professorial staff across the University and across STEM, where at 30% and 25% female, respectively we are significantly above the sector and various sector group averages (though there is certainly much more to do on this front in SMPCS and in our subject areas more broadly). We also reported on progress in promotions of research staff, where we have gone from hardly promoting any Research staff from Grade 6 to Grade 7 (1 woman, 7 men in the 4 years 2008-2011) to many promotions of both men and women (10 men and 11 women in the subsequent 4 promotion rounds). A lot of progress here was down to SMPCS - of course we have by far the largest research staff cohort - and the work we have done locally in supporting research staff through PDRs and regular workshops on career development (which have now been copied in other Schools).

Looking to the future, the action plan has many items which touch directly on Schools (and the Deans are currently meeting with all Heads of Schools to talk these through). The most expensive - though this is mainly money moving around - is that Schools are now fully reimbursed when staff are on shared parental or maternity leave - with the proviso that 25% of this funding is reserved to aid a smooth return to work in a manner discussed with returner. Amongst a long list of other items I note that the University (and other schools) will be copying our own local SMPCS Flexible Working and Parental Leave websites. As HoS I found the flexible working website very useful in recruitment, indeed two of our senior male and female staff arrived here first on flexible working arrangements, reassured by the reality conveyed by the many examples these websites contain. This is part of a push to encourage both men and women to take up the relatively new shared parental leave - and we have already used male and female role models from SMPCS in our campaigning.

But really the work starts now we have got the Bronze renewal, and the SAT has morphed into the University’s Athena Implementation Team to monitor that actions are carried out and keep the plan under review. Calvin has been
part of the SAT/AIT, which should be great experience for the large work ahead in renewing our own School award.

3. Technological fixes to combat biases
There is a growing literature demonstrating that unconscious bias has a significant detrimental impact on career opportunities of people from particular demographics. For example, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) found that identical CVs with ‘white’ sounding names received 50% more interview callbacks than ones with African-American names. In another example, professors preferred to hire ‘Brian’ rather than ‘Karen’ who also had identical CVs (Steinpreis et al., 1999).

There are also examples of how changes to hiring procedures can overcome some of these biases. Goldin and Rouse (2000) showed that the recruitment rate of female musicians increased from 25% to 46% when auditions took place behind a screen. One relatively new start-up coming out of the Behavioural Insights Team (jointly owned by the UK government and Nesta) is Applied, which is a platform that aims to make recruitment smart, fair and easy. A recruiter using Applied will see “chunked” and “anonymised” details with answers to application questions from different applicants, presented in a randomised order and without indications of race or gender. The randomization is different for each person involved in the recruitment and Applied believe that this will mean that biases will be much reduced by this process. It has been trialled by the Behavioural Insights Team with promising results, producing a far more diverse shortlisting.

In some professions it is easier to remove less relevant information (names/age/gender/ethnicity) than others. The CVs of applicants for academic and research posts include lists of publications amongst other information that are difficult to remove identifiable aspects from. However, similar approaches to this could be something to consider developing.

4. The University Cultural Diversity Group and new #DiverseReading blog
Our Deans of diversity have set up a new blog #DiverseReading: http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/diversereading/, with posts covering all aspects of diversity and inclusion. Well worth a read to find out what is happening within the University and beyond.
There is also a relatively new University Cultural Diversity Group for staff. The group is for all colleagues across the University interested in how race, ethnicity and cultural differences affect our University, providing a forum for discussion and support. The group had its first meeting in December. There will be another meeting in April/May. Please contact Ellie Highwood for details if you are interested in joining.

5. What to do about harassment

There are two important support networks that have been in place at the University for a number of years. The Harassment Adviser and HARC Adviser networks are members of staff who have volunteered to undertake these important roles. They have received specific training and provide informal and confidential support. They will listen to an individual’s concerns and may encourage them to seek more specialist advice and support from others.

Harassment Adviser network
Harassment Advisers provide support to staff and students at the University who believe they are experiencing harassment and bullying in any form. Essentially, they act as a neutral and impartial Adviser and support individuals through the informal resolution of their difficulties. They treat allegations seriously and will consider the perception of the individual raising the allegations. Further details can be found by clicking here including the Harassment Adviser profiles and contact list.
Health, Advocacy, Respect and Care (HARC) Adviser network
HARC Advisers provide more general support to staff at the University who feel they need someone to talk to but are unable to approach a colleague or line manager. For example, this could be someone who is feeling stressed or anxious, or someone who is new to the University and is unsure where to turn to for advice.
Further details can be found by clicking here including the HARC Adviser profiles and contact list.
If you would like to find out more about these networks please contact Alan Twyford, HR Partner on x8755.