The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee considers matters that directly or indirectly prevent some groups of people from fulfilling their potential or from participating fully in the life of the School. If you have any questions or ideas for this committee please use our confidential suggestions box on the website or contact claire.burrage@nottingham.ac.uk (Committee Chair) or michael.merrifield@nottingham.ac.uk (Head of School). We will respond directly to you or we will leave a response on the School Diversity Committee Workspace within 24 hours of the message reaching us.

School of Physics and Astronomy Diversity Committee Newsletter

The postgraduate women in physics conference

by Lizzie Elmer

On Friday 6th March, UoN Physics hosted its first Postgraduate Women in Physics Conference. The day involved talks from six incredible women, who had moved into a variety of academic and industrial careers after completing their PhDs in Physics: Dr Emma Bradshaw (above), Social Media Producer at the BBC. Dr Susha Parameswaran, Lecturer in Theoretical Physics at University of Liverpool. Dr Camilla Schlepe, Senior Scientist at G4M Systematic | Cantab. Prof. Helen Gleeson, Head of School of Physics and Astronomy at Leeds. Dr Devasuda Anblagan, Finance Manager for NHS England. Dr Jess Wade, an early career researcher in the Blackett Laboratory at Imperial College London. We also ran a poster competition where attendees could showcase their own research.

All of the speakers gave amazing and very personal talks about what they do now, and how their PhD helped them reach that point. The day finished with a Q&A session where attendees could ask the speakers more about their experiences and what advice they would give to current female PhD students. The event was a great success with a number of attendees commenting on it being a very inclusive environment and helping them clarify what they want to do after they complete their PhDs. We hope the event will be run again in the future, and want to say a huge thank you to everyone who helped make the day happen.

Covid-19

There have been huge changes over the last few months, and we are all trying to adjust and keep going. Our first priority at the moment is to look after everyone in the school as much as possible.

On the next page are a selection of links and resources which may provide useful help and support. We will also be running focus groups to hear about your experiences and what else we could be doing to support you – details over the page.

Each year we support a few of our students to attend national events for under-represented groups in STEM subjects. Here are some of their experiences:

Matilda Chalk at CUWiP

In March this year I was really lucky to attend the Conference for Undergraduate Women in Physics (CUWiP 2020) at the University of York and, despite some last minute readjustments, the conference was an amazing event. There were about 100 female physics undergraduates from across the UK all at different stages of their degrees. We attended talks from fascinating women (including Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell) which were really inspirational.

One of my favourite parts was the workshop on communicating to the media by Sue Nelson (a science journalist and former BBC science correspondent), where we got an insight into what it’s like to do science programmes for radio, which was something I hadn’t heard a lot about before.

I took part in the medical physics workshop which has confirmed my ambition to do medical physics after my degree. We went round different stations which involved injecting radioisotopes into a baby (a fake one!), and learning about areas such as nuclear medicine, radiography and non-ionising imaging.

We visited the York Plasma institute where we met PhD students working on fusion research who were all really enthusiastic about their work and showed us around some of their labs.

I had a brilliant time and would definitely recommend people to go next year if they get the chance.

Asante Ntata at the Minorities in STEM Symposium

I’m normally sceptical about events which are aimed specifically at minorities. I sometimes feel as though they serve to reinforce the differences between minorities and non-minorities in a negative way. But looking at the programme, there seemed to be something different about this one so I decided to give it a chance.

I’m pleased to say that the minorities in STEM symposium was a great way to begin life as a PhD student at the University of Nottingham. It was eye opening to hear the panel share their experiences. As one particular panelist spoke about the feelings and anxieties she had in the early stages of her career, I could feel myself relating to some of the things she was saying. Sometimes you don’t realise that you feel a certain way until someone else articulates it. A friend of mine, John Mothibi (Chemical Engineering, University of Oxford) particularly enjoyed the session when the audience were given the chance to ask the panellists questions. He noticed himself also having similar questions as others and it highlighted that many of the issues are not unique to institutions but are prevalent in STEM across the country.

One of the most effective ways we can increase the representation of minorities in STEM activities is to decrease the negative perception that potential applicants may have. It is through workshops like these that we can begin to do that.

Thank you to the organisers for all of their hard work! (l to r) Amy Whitney, Lizzie Elmer, Hannah Coleman, Emily Tyler
Rosany Antonyvincent at the Minorities in STEM Symposium

I really enjoyed my time at the symposium and I am awe of the wonderful people who are doing so much in the Minorities in STEM network. It was really eye opening to hear the stories of BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) women who have made it through the academic journey and prospered. Equally inspiring was hearing about women of colour who are heavily involved in outreach. I came back with more knowledge and more ideas to mull over.

The keynote speaker at the end of the symposium, Nicola Rollock, Reader in Equality & Education at Goldsmiths College, University of London, had such a powerful stance on Black women in Academia, all backed up with her own data and results, which had an even bigger impact I feel on the audience. She preached honesty and she's executed it in a clever way.

I do sometimes feel that when I start talking about being BME in Physics that I can’t be honest, as if talking about it is like I'm uncovering a huge elephant in the room so I should in fact not identify with it at all. Here however, in this space, with so many like-minded people, it felt so comfortable and like a place of belonging to talk and know that I don’t need to explain what I consider basic understanding just because we've all lived some part of the same journey.

Focus Groups

I’d like to invite you to participate in a focus group I'm holding to discuss how COVID-19 is affecting people in the school of Physics and Astronomy.

The focus groups will be run on Microsoft Teams, and you will receive an invitation shortly by email. I’m aiming for each focus group to be an informal discussion about any COVID-19 related issues within the school and the University. I'm eager to hear what your experiences in the school have been, both positive and negative, and to discuss any actions the school could take to improve things.

We will hold separate focus groups for different groups within the school. These will be:

6 May 13:00-14:00 Research associates and research fellows
7 May 13:00-14:00 Undergraduate students
11 May 14:00-15:00 Staff
13 May 14:00-15:00 Post-graduate students

I hope to see many of you there.

If you can’t join the focus group at these times, please feel free to email your thoughts to clare.burrage@nottingham.ac.uk.

Best wishes, Clare

[as chair of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee]

Coronavirus and Lockdown help and support

Resources for Everyone

Physics Community Moodle page – general advice, key information and answers to FAQs. Includes links to resources such as the Yellow Book – practical tips on maintaining wellbeing from Rethink Your Mind

The University Counselling Service

Information about the University’s wellbeing provision - Wellbeing Hub

Health and Wellbeing at Home - resources from the Department of Sport

Chaplaincy and Faith Support

Information and links to further resources from the Race Equality Foundation

Support from the LGBT foundation

Mind – resources on Corona Virus and Wellbeing

Mind – resources on Mental Wellbeing

Resources for Students

One-stop Help-Zone for students experiencing difficulties

The Support and Wellbeing Team

The Student Hardship Fund

Email Disability Support

Students’ Union Advice

Student Minds – for mental health support

First Steps, Eating Disorders in Student Services

Resources for Staff

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) confidential and free on-line counselling and telephone information service - access via the Employee Hub

Resources including: effective remote working, equality, diversity and inclusion toolkit and wellbeing programme - Leadership and Management Academy Hub

For advice and help - Human Resources Helpline

Chartered Institute of Personnel Management (CPID) - Getting the most from remote working

Staff networks, with links to Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) Staff Network, Carers’ Staff Network, Disability Staff Network, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Questioning (LGBTQ) Staff Network, Women’s Staff Network

Staff Wellbeing Guide