

EDI Newsletter

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

March 2022



Athena Swan

As we prepare our application for the Athena Swan silver award, we would like to firstly thank all staff and students for their contribution/s to this newsletter, and for their support towards equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) at the University of Aberdeen.

Deep-rooted cultural changes are possible when leaders acknowledge the existence of social inequities, and when staff and students feel empowered to share day-to-day, lived experiences. Finding scalable and sustainable initiatives to support EDI can help drive the desired progress in these areas. The Business School EDI committee members are working hard towards developing scalable action points that align with the four strategic themes from the University's 2040 Strategic Plan. These themes that shape the learning, research, and strategic actions are - Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, International, and Sustainable.

Through these themes we hope to create a positive culture based on tolerance and inclusion, and support individuals from all backgrounds reach their full potential. Currently our focus is on submitting a successful application for Athena Swan Silver (upgrading our bronze award) by the middle of the calendar year. Our commitment to inclusion should be a top priority, as this institutional engagement can enhance the experience of all in our community, influence global rankings, and help achieve a competitive business advantage.

Mark Whittington and Cheryl Dowie

– Co Chairs, Business School EDI Committee



Hello

Welcome to the Spring 2022 edition of the EDI Newsletter! I am Haina Zhang, the Head of the Business School at the University of Aberdeen. Our school is home to a thriving community of diverse students, faculty and staff members plus industry experts. We have an international focus and outlook, and many cultures are represented in our faculty and student community. Our international students comprise 74% of the overall student population and we have 53.5% international faculty from

over 26 nationalities. The Business School has benefited from sustained investment in recent years, and we continue to achieve paced growth in the future.

While we continue to evolve and embrace equality, diversity and inclusion, our central commitment is to continually develop a school culture, focused on well-being, where each student and staff member feels highly valued. Our people are our most valuable assets, and we are working on a new People Strategy designed to help drive developments in our School culture being purposeful, professional and respectful.

We have a mission “to power change in uncertain times for better businesses and better lives” and our people strategy is central to ensuring the school achieves its strategic goals and our students receive an exceptional experience. It is through our people that world-class education and research that achieves real-world impact will be delivered.

Haina Zhang

Head of Business School



New home for the Business School

The Johnston Redevelopment project, set to become the home of the Business School in 2025, completed in January 2022 the RIBA (Royal Institute of British Architecture) Stage 2 milestone. This signals an important step for the project: with the building design concept now complete, the project now moves to RIBA stage 3 and will focus on the more practical aspects such as ensuring building regulations and sustainability goals are achieved, and accessibility guidelines followed.

The building will not only house the 150+ staff and 50+ PhD students in offices in the refurbished Johnston Halls, but the new teaching pavilion also has specialist teaching facilities such as financial services training Bloomberg suite, Scottish Experimental Economics Laboratory (SEEL), world class executive education facilities and a 200-student flexible learning space. The campus space is being sensitively renovated to minimise the carbon footprint of the

project with over 80% of the building project repurposed from the former Johnston Halls. The landscaping plan ensures all trees are protected and all paving areas are upgraded to meet the University's accessibility standards.

The building will have 2 large PV (photovoltaic) panel areas on the roof to contribute renewable energy to the building and the design team are currently exploring further ways the building can achieve the 2040 goals. This enviable high street location, across from Kings College, will enhance the Business School's place within the university community, with students and staff set to enjoy this new campus for years to come. We encourage all staff and students to contribute their ideas for the new building, please email adam.smith1@abdn.ac.uk

Adam Smith



even just continuing as we always have, impacts members of our community (or stops some from joining the University community at all). The University has sought to engage with this in a number of ways.

One of these was back in Summer 2020 when there were a series of events where staff and students collaborated in "Supporting Learning for Students from Diverse Ethnic, Cultural and Educational Backgrounds". [The Celebrating Diversity](#) blog is one way we seek to build on this and the "Open to All" discussions are another.

Open to All is an online monthly drop in session for staff, usually on the second Wednesday of the month at 2:30pm for no more than an hour where issues of access, success and acceptance for students are considered. Sometimes they are completely without a focus and people can bring what they want; other times there will be a spotlight where we perceive or know there needs to be improvement.

As we seek to build a more understanding, respectful and accepting community, "Open to All" seeks to be an open conversation about how we might be aware of circumstances that can lead to inequality of either experience or opportunity at the University including those that may slip under the radar or may fall beyond the boundaries of the important "protected characteristics" from the Equality Act. Alongside the protected characteristics, other examples of discussion range those with experience of care environments, estrangement from family, veterans, to refugees and asylum seekers. The reality is that none of us have the life experience to come up with a complete list of what might disadvantage or exclude.

Attending these discussions has opened my eyes to how University life hasn't been equally accessible or easy for all who could benefit. At best, we then seek to find ways forward through, for example, learning of good practice of some colleagues or greater awareness of help that might be available or pushing for change.

A small group, including Cheryl Dowie and myself, lightly organise the sessions. Please feel free to join the discussion!

Mark Whittington

**"Open to All"
- a discussion**

Thanks to the Principal's re-emphasising of the University's original aim of "Open to all and dedicated to the pursuit of truth in the service of others", we have a clear imperative to seek to remove any barriers for students and staff as we seek to be inclusive.

We know that such phrases are easier to state than they are to work out in practice. Life is complex and we struggle to understand how our attitudes, our systems, our language and, perhaps,

LGBT History Month

LGBT History Month is an annual month long celebration that occurs every February and gives us a chance to connect as a community, to reflect on the past and present of the LGBTQ+ community.

As part of this month's celebrations I recently gave a presentation to the Business School EDI committee "A History of Queer Representation In Western Cinema" discussing the representation of queer people throughout cinematic history, intersectionality and queer theory.

You can view the recording [here](#).

Lucy Holmes



Schools Fair Trade Engagement

Fairtrade is a topic close to people's hearts not just because the chocolate tastes nice. By buying Fairtrade products we are ensuring farmers/producers get fair prices for their products, decent working conditions, building stronger communities and having control over their futures. By choosing Fairtrade products we can be assured that the producers and businesses have met internationally agreed standards. We regularly find chocolate, fruit, sugar, ice-cream, wine, coffee, honey and tea all displaying the easily recognisable logo of Fairtrade. This of course does open up a debate for the consumer with shop local vs Fairtrade.

Pupils at Fishermoss Primary School in Portlethen recently enjoyed an online workshop with Pam Cumming, Schools Engagement Officer for the Business School. The class learnt about the University, the Business School and talked through some marketing terminology before the practical work started. Each group within the class were challenged to be an Events Team who had to organise a Fairtrade event in their school which would raise awareness about Fairtrade which will increase sales, raise money and improve the lives of farmers etc. The groups worked hard and produced a poster which they presented to Pam the following week detailing what they would be selling, competitions, where they would host their event, the costs involved, and also how the event would be promoted.

Pam Cumming

Student Spotlight

"Overall, my time at university this academic year has been both entertaining and fulfilling. Despite the present global health scenario, academic and administrative personnel have worked hard over the last year to maintain excellent levels of education and student assistance. Over the course of the epidemic, teaching has been at the finest it could be. The academics were incredibly enthusiastic about their work and wanted students to succeed; the staff and students genuinely cared about students, and I was recognized and valued for my thoughts. To add to it, the diversity of the campus has given me the opportunity to make friends with people from all over the world.

There is also an unbelievable number of information and assistance made available to international students to enable them to settle in properly. Notable among them is the student support outfit. Also, the personnel at the Careers and Employability Centre have provided me with information on various opportunities in the UK as well as excellent advice on how to construct a good CV and how to approach application forms, which has given me the confidence and grit I require.

Finally, I was astounded to observe that practically all the structures were constructed of stone with gleaming silver particles of mica. If I had to select just one thing about Aberdeen, it would be the pleasant people who make a wonderful city like Aberdeen appear even more appealing. I also appreciate the fact that I can go around on a bicycle, which makes life a lot more active and cost-effective."

Emmanuel Osarfo



Academic Spotlight

“The performance impact of gender diversity in the top management team and board of directors: A multiteam systems approach” was published in *Human Resources Management*. We investigated whether and how having both women and men in the top management team or in the board of directors has a significant influence on organizational innovation and long-term financial performance. Importantly, evidence from the study of both Chinese firms and UK firms confirm our conceptualization by showing an interaction effect between top management gender diversity and board of director gender diversity such that innovation is greatest when both are high.

Another paper I recently worked on “Gender Faultline Strength on Boards of Directors and Strategic Change: The Role of Environmental Conditions” was also published in *Group & Organization Management*. We investigated how the gender faultline (i.e. discrepancy) of a board of directors is negatively related to strategic change and how this negative effect could be shifted to the positive effect when environmental complexity (environmental dynamism, or environmental munificence) increases from low levels to high levels. In other words, while gender discrepancy is not so useful at a relatively simple and static environment, dynamic environment elicit a team consisting of both men and women exhibiting high differences to generate more positive effects (e.g., stimulate both men and women to appreciate each other and learn from each other).

Jie Wu

Memories of an awkward conversation

We each have almost random moments when you see things differently than before. These may not be comfortable and might lead to questioning your upbringing or culture. I thought I'd share one of those moments.

I am older than I would like to admit, so let's just say I went to University around 1980. I had a normal first week at University where people from different places and with varied backgrounds meet for the first time and chat about issues that are potentially awkward. In my case, I met a guy called Dave who became a good friend. He was from Ireland and we got off to a tricky start as somehow the conversation turned to the “Irish Potato Famine”, if, like me, you had English history lessons, or the “Great Famine”, if your

history was from Irish textbooks. As we discussed what we had been taught it became clear that we had received and taken on two differing historical narratives about the late 1840's. There were a few shared facts (poverty, potato dependency, the disease, famine and resultant deaths) but no shared story of how this had come about – why the population was so poor, who had made key political decisions, the role of land ownership etc.

For me, the famine had been taught as a story of another land with little consideration of cause and effect; for Dave it was the lived history of his ancestors with a lack of self-determination or control over their lives. It says a great deal for Dave that he didn't just write me off as a crazed spoon-fed British imperialist but saw me as a naïve learner, who might be willing to take on an alternative perspective.



Returning to work as a mum

I started my maternity leave in November 2020. Our son was born shortly after that. Words fail me to describe the depth of joy he brought with his arrival to our life. Of course, I was looking forward to bringing him to campus on my return and to introducing him to my colleagues. One of our lunch time gatherings would have been an ideal opportunity for this.

Alas, only if the pandemic had not made WFH the prevailing normality... Many empty offices and quiet corridors in MacRobert meant that I should wait a bit longer for a suitable time when I can bring my son to campus and show him to my colleagues. But this wasn't the only aspect of this new normality which had been deepened into our style of working over my leave and I needed to get my head around it. The closer I got to the end of my leave, the more often I asked myself if I remembered all technical details of tutoring online – how to work with collaborate, how to record my lectures on

Panopto, how to manage MyAberdeen for my upcoming course which I was to coordinate starting from September, and many other details.

Was I ready for it? Was I sharp enough? After all, I was away from all this for about 10 months. I knew I had got a bit rusty with those skills and this gave me concerns. It was amid all those thoughts that my phone calendar reminded me of a course I had booked shortly before I started my maternity leave and was to start in one week! A 5-day course with CAD on tutoring online. What was I thinking back then? Had I seen it through which concerns I'd be likely to have towards the end of my maternity? Whatever the thinking behind this and however challenging it was to take a full week course during my maternity, I actively attended the course and completed all assignments. It worked a magic. I came back to work with confidence, knowing that I know 'my stuff'. Refreshing my skills proved to be particularly helpful in the first months of my return – the time that I had to go

through some tough weeks of working and mothering a child who went to nursery for the first time and was inevitably ill at home very often. In such a challenging time, it was certainly a help not to have to worry about my technical skills of online tutoring and managing MyAberdeen page of my course.

But I was one of the luckiest ones: Lucky that my husband, being employed in another country with a more generous paternity allowance compared to the UK, was on paternity leave in the early months of my return. This had a significant effect on making the challenge of working and parenting manageable in those early months. Lucky to have supportive colleagues in the School and Discipline level, taking care that I have a 'soft landing'. Without this base of support, I don't know how I could cope. I don't know how any mum returning to work from maternity leave could cope without such sorts of luck. I just wish one day my story is not anymore, a tale of luck, but a narrative of normality.

Elham Moonesirust

Lessons for life

The culture and history we inherit, experience, are taught or take for granted as our "norm", comes with perspectives that may not be shared by those from other cultures or parts of the planet – bear in mind that England and Ireland are not that far apart geographically, yet the perceptions of the famine differed greatly! Being able to meet and listen to people with other lived experiences or from other cultures and nations is a privilege. To acknowledge that their version of a story has legitimacy and meaning affirms their dignity whilst broadening the listener's awareness and understanding.

Mark Whittington

