



Transcript of the Women at Oxford 100 years on: from access to inclusion

A panel discussion and Q&A

Tuesday 10 November 2020

Host

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Panellists

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Sue Dopson, Deputy Dean, Saïd Business School

Matthew Jarvis, Associate Head of People, Mathematics, Physics and Life Sciences (MPLS)

Nikita Ma, President, Oxford Students' Union

Saira Shaikh, Academic Registrar, Academic Administration Division

**Rebecca Surender:** Good afternoon everyone and welcome to today's online panel discussion on the University's work on gender equality. I'm Rebecca Surender, University Advocate for Equality and Diversity and I'm delighted that you have joined us today. I know how busy everybody is, so it's great you made time to attend today's event. Today's panel discussion is one event in a year-long series of activities that are happening across the collegiate University, to commemorate the centenary of women being admitted as full student members of the University. We

are of course delighted to be able to commemorate this important, significant, historical event.

It is important to commemorate this event, to mark it, not least of all because it actually acknowledges the huge amount of effort and struggle that women and men 100 years ago had to undertake to advance gender equality at Oxford.

Those of us involved in coordinating this work didn't want the event to simply end by being 'celebratory' or commemorative, i.e. a remembrance or dedication to something that was an historical event only. We felt it was important to use the opportunity to actually continue the discussion across the University about gender equality today; hence the title of today's event, which is 'Women at Oxford 100 Years on: from access to inclusion'. Clearly a huge amount has happened in the last 100 years at Oxford and across the education sector more generally. Women are now admitted in equal numbers to men at undergraduate level at this University. And as our very distinguished panel itself indicates, women are represented amongst our most senior administrative and academic leaders and represented amongst our most high-profile and successful researchers and academics, and we are delighted with those advances. And yet, we know that on almost any metric you might choose, we haven't yet quite got to full equality and full inclusion, and so today's event is really about interrogating that a bit more and thinking about what we need to do to reach full gender equality, specifically at Oxford.

We've asked that colleagues at the University send in questions around three themes. The three themes are; 'what are our biggest challenges for advancing gender equality at Oxford in the next five years?'; secondly, 'how can our vision of and approach to gender equality at Oxford be truly intersectional and inclusive?'; and thirdly, 'what promising initiatives for advancing gender and other equalities from within or outside the University can we build on?'

Today's discussions are very much about what is the state of play at the University currently, and what should we be doing, what could we be doing to promote and accelerate further change? As I say, we have a very distinguished group of panellists and I'm very grateful to busy colleagues for participating today. Thank you to the

panellists. I'm going to ask them now to introduce themselves and say a few words about their position at the University and their engagement with equality issues.

I will now invite my colleagues to introduce themselves and perhaps we could start with Jocelyn Bell Burnell from the Department of Physics and Mansfield College.

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** Good afternoon and welcome, and thank you everybody for being here and thank you for the opportunity to be part of this panel. Rebecca described everybody as very senior, I'm so senior I'm retired. My position in the University is actually as a visitor. But I have a long track record of working on gender issues and I have been involved in some of the gender issues at the University of Oxford and it's an area which I can't stop watching. I have been the first female in various roles through my life, and University people can 'boo' at this point, I'm one of the creators of the Athena Swan scheme set up by a small group of senior women scientists trying to work out how to make things better for women scientists in academia. Thank you.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you very much, a characteristically understated introduction to yourself, but we will hear more about your experience and work later. Sue Dopson please.

**Sue Dopson:** Thank you, good afternoon everybody. Again, like Jocelyn, delighted to be here. I was hired as an RA (research assistant) by the first female Don in management, Rosemary Stuart, about 30 years ago, which seems very frightening, and I have been at the Business School as it is now ever since I was at Templeton College. It's also been lonely actually in the Business School in terms of women, it's been a small group over those many years. But it's meant that I, as an individual, have been catapulted into all sorts of leadership roles that I am sure I was not qualified for at all, but as a result of that, I have built up an incredible network within the University and one of the advantages of being lonely, I think, is that one has had those opportunities to grow particularly in a leadership role. But more recently I have been Faculty Dean at the Business School and now Deputy Dean serving with colleagues to try and influence more of the diversity agenda at the Business School. I have been responsible with colleagues for hiring, promotion, HR issues, including

pay and help with Athena Swan, thank you Jocelyn for the help with that process as well.

Beyond being a kind of academic and holding leadership roles at SBS (Saïd Business School), I also try and coach and I did that deliberately because over the years I have recognised how coaching can be an immensely supportive process for leadership growth, and particularly for women. I also help design with colleagues a number of leadership development programmes as part of what we do at the Business School. One of which is called Women Transforming Leadership and this is an incredibly controversial programme because it was our only programme that was simply for women. We did that because we felt there was a need for a safer space and this is what we were getting back from leadership participants who were women in our mixed programmes, that there was a place for something different, where women could have different kinds of conversations. That programme has been going for seven years, and has been an international programme, and I think has been immensely helpful for changing the kinds of conversation and changing the way in which we should think about leadership and recognising there are many different ways to lead, there's not just one way, you don't need to be the hero leader. That has been instrumental in my own thinking and work on diversity.

We've also done research in that space as well. We have interviewed 100 women on that programme, starting with colleagues Michael Smet, Joanna Probert and others, to get a sense of what are the career stages and what challenges did women face in relation to those stages. And then finally, more recent work on diversity, I have been very lucky again in the Business School to have a grant from the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund which supports strategically important activities across the University and with Helen McShane and Mahima Mitra we are investigating attitudes and training support that can promote a more diverse research community in Oxford. That's early days in that work, but again the interviews of qualitative work is leading to some very interesting insights, not only just about what the problems and challenges are amongst not just women but diversity and also what we might do differently. So very passionate about this subject, and delighted to have the conversation. Thank you.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you very much. Can I invite Matt Jarvis next please?

**Matt Jarvis:** Thank you, a bit of background, so I was the first person in my family to go to university, coming from a small mining town in the Midlands. I have worked at various universities. I was an undergraduate in Birmingham, and I was a lecturer at the University of Hertfordshire before coming to Oxford, so I have had experience outside of Oxford which is important. And being invited to be part of this panel made me go back and look at what my group or people that I have employed, what the diversity of my group has been and I was surprised to learn I have of 15 female PhD students and 12 male PhD students in astrophysics and that wasn't by design or any kind of bias, it's just what happened. I have also had seven people of colour. And it goes to show that regardless of subject, diversity and inclusion and equality is possible, I think, if you have an open mind.

I hadn't really done much in terms of equality and diversity for most of my career and I was encouraged to take on a role in physics by the people in my group and I'm grateful for them pushing me in that direction because I've learnt an awful lot since going on the physics E&D committee and then becoming chair of that committee, and introducing various initiatives and mainly supporting colleagues with their great ideas. Just highlighting one that's now under way is the challenges and changes in physics organised by Alex Ramadan and the next one is tomorrow, so I am advertising that, and we are taking a different perspective on seeing how different people from different backgrounds and different people have developed in their careers as physicists, rather than their astounding research achievements. Also with Daisy Hung in MPLS we introduced a diversifying the curriculum project, where we are looking at under-represented people who have contributed massively to physics research so we can put that into undergraduate lectures. I am the first associate of MPLS, which includes EN&I and we have managed to set up the first tranche of ED&I fellows across MPLS, and some of that we have managed to already set up where we have one in each department to help us develop our action plans going forward. And also with predominantly focussing on culture change and not sticking plasters on existing problems. I will stop there, and I am pleased to be here. Thank you.

**Rebecca Surender:** Nikita Ma please.

**Nikita Ma:** Hello. Thank you so much for having me. I'm Nikita Ma, I use she/her pronouns, I am the President of Oxford SU, that is, the Student Union. I finished my second year of PPE at Trinity College and I'm suspending to take up this role. I am very happy to be here and I have been fortunate to be given many opportunities to take on leadership positions during my time as a student here. For example, I was Chair of Student Council, I was the president of a few societies and also the Divisional Representative for undergraduates in Humanities in my first year and Social Sciences in my second year. Now I am President of the Student Union. For me equality and diversity is one of my main priorities, especially lobbying for more diversity in senior positions. As a student union we are also re-starting our women's campaign which I will be working on with Alex Foley, our VP for Women, and to create more spaces for women and non-binary people in this University.

**Rebecca Surender:** Nikita, thank you very much. And Saira Shaikh please.

**Saira Shaikh:** Good afternoon everyone. My name is Saira Shaikh and I am the Academic Registrar. A little bit of personal history; I was first generation going into university, I studied a science subject, so I think I can recognise many of the issues that are facing the MPLS Division for example, in terms of attracting females into STEM subjects and I was one of a relatively small proportion of students studying my degree and at PhD level. I have worked at Oxford for 15 years, and I have spent time both in the Social Sciences Division and in the MPLS Division.

In MPLS, we certainly saw the rise of the importance of Athena Swan and Race Equality Charter. I know Jocelyn made a little comment there about Athena Swan, at its heart it has a really important function to play. I think we all have a role to play in seeing how we can help move it away from being seen as a tick box exercise into something meaningful that can actually help inform and influence our policy in the institution. Certainly, whilst I was in MPLS we tried to make sure we learnt from the processes that we went through in actually producing our Athena Swan submissions.

There's been a lot of policy development over the years, even in the short time I have been with the University. One of the things I think all the divisions might be particularly proud of having helped establish is the Returning Careers Fund, a fund that was there to help staff who had to take a caring break, typically maternity leave to be able to return back to their role in the University often these were early career researchers; get back to the bench, get back to the library, and get their research and their teaching on-going, with a little bit of funding support to reconnect after that caring break. I think that's been a really important thing that the University has done. But there's still plenty more that we can do.

Now that I am an Academic Registrar, I am responsible for the central function that supports student administration in all student facing services, and we have a huge agenda to tackle around diversity and equality. As Rebecca mentioned at the start, our undergraduate population is balanced now in terms of male/female split but when you dig down under the detail of that, at subject level, there are discrepancies and I know from my own history that there will be a smaller proportion of female students studying in those STEM subjects.

There's still work for us still to do, even in terms of access and participation of female students. That's important because it ultimately feeds the pipeline that we want to see progress from undergraduate study to graduate, to research and academic positions. Many things are very connected. A big theme I think also for myself as Academic Registrar as laid out in the University's access and participation plan, is a concern around attainment gaps, and this is the difference that exists between the performance of female students versus male students in terms of attainment at first-class degrees. This is an issue that actually hits the higher education sector as a whole. It is particularly marked at Oxford, on average the attainment gap stands at something like 8.5% but it is in fact more marked when you dig down at the detailed level, at the subject level and some subjects have larger attainment gaps than that. This has been a long persisting issue, again when I was back in MPLS I know chemistry was doing a lot of work trying to understand what was driving that. We're still not quite there. I'm hoping in my role as Academic Registrar with the Centre for Teaching and Learning and the work that it's doing on teaching inclusive approaches

to teaching and learning practice, will help to start fact find the ways forward on that issue.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you so much. You have already started to get us going on a number of key issues. I just have to check in case our colleagues listening think that we're somehow stacking the rafts here, you didn't study astrophysics as well did you?

**Saira Shaikh:** No, I didn't. Experimental physics:

**Rebecca Surender:** We have three physicists but there are other scientists available for gender equality work! Let's get started. So, I'm going to start with some of the pre-submitted questions. Ideally we would be sitting around a table and this would be more conversational rather than a series of talking heads, and I apologise to everybody about that. I'm going to try to do my best to facilitate conversation, but could I say to the panellists, I will invite various of you to perhaps lead off on things, but please jump in if you have something to add, please do. Let's start with a very broad question, something that just opens the conversation. Somebody has written in to say we clearly made progress, we've started talking about that already, but in what areas, what specific areas could we do better on gender equality? Saira, maybe you could lead off on this?

**Saira Shaikh:** Yes, thank you Rebecca. Yes, perhaps my introduction somewhat segways into this question. I want to attack it from a student perspective, given my knowledge of that. So in terms of what could we do better in terms of student related matters in this regard, I think I would look at it from both admissions attainment and progression. At admissions level as has been commented, the undergraduate population at Oxford is 50-50 balanced, but there are discrepancies and differences at individual subject level. I'm very conscious of a lot of work that has gone on in outreach activities and various initiatives to reach out to students to engage in those subject areas, typically STEM subjects that females don't seem to want to apply for. I think we're somewhat driven by stereotypes and things that become very gendered at a very early age. So even reaching out to school children, sometimes you have really got to go back to primary level almost to start to unleash the potential of

females to see themselves in future as coming into STEM subjects. So that's the admission of female students in particular subject areas is somewhere where we can continue the good work we're already doing and move further forward on that.

I have already touched on attainment gap, which as I say, is a strategic priority within our access and participation plan. I think COVID unfortunately has perhaps not enabled us to get some of the things moving forward as we had hoped, but as I said earlier, the move to a more inclusive teaching and learning strategy is certainly a priority we want to take forward in the hope that helps drive downwards the differences of attainment.

Then progression and moving students on from undergraduate study, obviously particularly female graduates to see they can move on to graduate study, my colleagues in MPLS will no doubt draw on the examples that they have had there of targeted initiatives, with graduate students. I think there's even a classic issue and this is within physics, where females predominantly take the three-year exit point out of the physics degree, as compared to going through and completing to the full level. Trying to understand why is that the case, why are they deciding to quit at that point. And trying to encourage and nurture them to see that they should continue. As well as those that successfully continue moving on to graduate level study, for all the reasons I mentioned earlier.

These are areas that I think are points of focus that the University has to continue to work at.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thanks Saira. Matt, did you have something to add perhaps from MPLS?

**Matt Jarvis:** Just picking up the point of what Saira mentioned in physics where we saw a drop-off of females students at the three-year point. We have now changed that, so the default is the four-year degree rather than three-year. So the default now is you do four years, your choice is to reduce rather than the other way round. We don't know how that's going to work yet but that's one of the things I was also going to mention.

I think in a general point, I think it's slightly more, not depressing but concerning, is how we deal with harassment cases. This isn't just restricted to universities. It's a problem across all institutes and businesses a lot of the time, wherever people who are victims of harassment don't feel like they can make a complaint because it would be detrimental to their careers or reputation.

One of the things we can do at the University level is work out ways of reducing the amount of power that individuals in senior positions actually have over people's careers. One way of partially doing that is to actually make the PIs careers and reputation dependent on the people they manage. When we do reviews of senior figures in the University, we actually have references from their group members for instance and we do a 360-degree review. We actually award people who are actually managing their groups well as well as those people that just bring in lots of cash or write lots of high impact paper, but we reward those people who are managing groups well and actually value that on the same level as all the other things we traditionally value.

**Rebecca Surender:** Nikita, did you want to add anything from student perspective?

**Nikita Ma:** Definitely. I think there are a lot of ways we could do better. The first one would be having more women in positions of power especially the STEM fields. And also closing the gender attainment gap for students. I think these are definitely things we need to do better at. Also I think we have a tendency to look at statistics when we talk about equality, so for example, how many female students we have, or how many female staff we have in senior positions. But also I think it's important to put the focus on the experiences of the female and non-binary students and staff at the University. That would naturally encourage them to go on to either graduate studies or more senior positions. I think some measures could include having more maternity and paternity leave as well as support for colleagues as they need it. Lastly I would say encouraging the use of pro nouns and making that something universal within the University. I do think we non-binary people would feel more comfortable with that.

**Rebecca Surrender:** Thank you. We will drill down on some of the how do we achieve these things, this is opening up, what do we need to do, we will I hope be looking at how we do it. One of the strategies that this University, and all institutions increasingly are turning to, is really tackling unconscious bias. We've had a number of questions about unconscious bias in both staff and student populations, particularly in hiring committees. I wonder whether colleagues could just talk about that as a strategy for recruitment and also some of the other issues that Matt and Nikita and Saira have raised.

Jocelyn, do you want to maybe kick off on that?

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** Yes, thank you very much Rebecca. Unconscious bias by its nature is quite hard to spot. And my favourite example of it and I have to say Oxford University is good on this, but many organisations still are not. You have to fill out a questionnaire. There's a question about what sex or gender you are and there are various boxes to tick or various options to select. And it typically goes something like male, female, other, prefer not to say. The order is interesting. Male comes before female, that's not alphabetical order. But we are so used to it, we almost don't notice, but every time it sends a message to the females that they are second-class. I would imagine there is a similar issue on the question about race or colour.

It starts white, minority ethnic..... I know white is probably the majority still round here, but that's not alphabetical order either, and I think it probably gives the people who are in the first mentioned box a sense of superiority and the others are followers on and that's not just and not right. And there's probably more of that that I haven't noticed. I think it is really quite hard to notice.

It's the things that we've always done this way and we don't think about any more, the subtle things. We touched earlier on the gendering of children. I actually think children are gendered at birth, if not before birth. Apparently the way male and female babies are handled is different. The males are handled more robustly.

Probably not much we can do about that, but there is something, not within the University, that everybody could do something about. Think of your typical toy shop. Probably primary school age toy shop. There's a pink section and a blue section.

And the pink section for the girls is the passive stuff, and the blue section for the boys is the educational and active stuff. I belong to a campaign called Let Toys Be Toys, to try and stop this gendering at a very early age. I think it probably does a lot of damage.

There's one other example I want to quote, and I'm not quite sure whether it was unconscious bias or something more disturbing. I have been ombudsperson, for the grad students in astrophysics, for quite a few years and there hasn't been a lot to do and most of it has been students coming to me and saying I don't have a problem, but my friend in such and such University does, what should I advise her to do? I got to hear of another science department in the University, I don't know which, where when new grad students arrived at the beginning of the year, the male students were allowed to choose projects and the head of department allocated the females to projects. Was that unconscious bias, or if I'm being nasty, was he diverting the female students away from certain supervisors? I don't know, I'll never know. But this is the kind of level that unconscious bias is at. It's quite subtle. It's quite hard to find, to notice, and it needs noticing. Thank you.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you very much, Jocelyn. Have you experience of good quality training in unconscious bias? Do you think this is something that can be tackled with training?

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** I think the issue is to spot the examples. I think if enough examples can be spotted and highlighted, people can probably do their own training. Because I don't think they are deliberately being sexist, it's just unconscious.

**Rebecca Surender:** Does anybody else on the panel want to comment on the strategy, unconscious bias training online is the increasing go-to instrument that's used. Matt.

**Matt Jarvis:** Yes, I think it's partially useful, the online training, but my worry with most training things it's good for those people who want to learn. They are generally the people that are more aware of their own unconscious bias or their biases anyway. So I think it doesn't have a negative effect, but it probably doesn't have as

positive an effect as we all would like. I think one of the things that compliments that is to try and make recruitment panels and recruitment in general more diverse, so we actually have interview panels with a more diverse group of people on them. You mitigate some of those biases by having that. Not all of them, but you can mitigate some of them.

**Rebecca Surender:** Saira.

**Saira Shaikh:** Just really to follow up Matt's point. Training is a general good thing to do, but sometimes you are either preaching to the converted or you've got people there who aren't directly engaging. I think one of the things that can be most powerful is just actually learning that you have the bias in the first place and I can't remember the name, so I apologise, but there's a Harvard assessment test or something where you click on, it's not necessarily about gender bias, it's about biases that you might have between thin and fat people or images of persons of that physical look, and actually it's only once you have done, taken yourself through that and you realise that you yourself have perhaps biases that had already acknowledged and were aware of them and were trying to work with, or it uncovered new biases that you didn't know. That's much more powerful. I wish we could roll that out and require them to do that thing rather than go to training. Although training is generally a good thing.

**Rebecca Surender:** I think we're getting some interesting questions in the live Q and A and I would like to take one of those. There's a question about, it still fits very much in what are our biggest challenges here. A question about women and people from less represented groups getting access to leadership experience and contributing to University governance structures. It's a key challenge for this University. It's high on our agenda. The question says, one thing I observed as a professional support staff on Athena Swan Working Group was how the few female faculty was spread very thin in order to be represented on various committees. So it's both need to do it but acknowledging the burdens on individuals. Sue, would you like to have a go at starting the discussion on that.

**Sue Dopson:** Yes, sure. So we know what develops leadership and there's some very strong themes. One is being stretched in some way. But being supported and stretched. So I think the thing that strikes me, how important mentorship is, I am struck by Matt's point about building into one's responsibility and what we are measured on as senior academics in terms of our responsibility for development, so being very proactive and thinking within your department, where are the stretch challenges that you can support? I think (this is) very important. We know that a really supportive mentor, coach, you learn such a lot from a great boss or a really rubbish boss, you don't want anybody in the middle. The notion of really learning, making sure we are looking for examples of good practice and leadership. But critically what we know about leadership is when we work through some kind of mistake or some kind of thing that didn't go so well for us. All of that suggests the importance of mentorship and coaching and being very serious.

There's been some wonderful initiatives from the University on mentorship that has been around. I can't underscore the importance of those safe spaces, where people not only are given expertise and experience but also given space to explore what went wrong or didn't go wrong by asking questions in a more coaching style. So I think that's incredibly important. I really would think about senior colleagues looking for experiences for stretch, but support.

So often, I have been in this case myself, you are catapulted into a significant leadership role with no training whatsoever. One of the things that we need to do is get better at self-management. So we know that women are not very good at saying no. I am a classic example of that. So actually strategies on how you say no can be very helpful in that. So self-management techniques, self-development techniques would become very important.

Lots of opportunity, we are such a diverse context, I would love people to come from sciences into the Business School and from the Business School, there's something about catapulting, for people to have different appreciation of different contexts, and learning together in that way and I think that would be a very helpful thing to do. Just some ideas off the top of my head.

**Rebecca Surender:** Really helpful. Any thoughts on the tension between wanting women represented at the highest levels of governance or any levels of governance, but at the same time this issue that it falls on relatively few people, and let me be a bit provocative, you've got a management position in a big department, should people who take part in governance have that recognised as legitimate stint and workload?

**Sue Dopson:** Completely and one of the things I am proud of at the Business School is that we do that. There is not only stint remission but also quite a lot of support for example, we do offer a coaching relationship for all our senior leadership issues if they want it, so that's outside, it's where you work things through. So I think that's incredibly important. I think respect from colleagues.

One of the challenges, and I am in this position now, is that you need to think about your successors and building a leadership bench underneath. I think a lot of people obviously want to protect colleagues as they develop their careers in terms of publication and teaching. This is why thinking very creatively about small steps in leadership work, as people are developing at different stages of their career is really important. But it needs to be recognised, because you can do a lot of damage as a leader, as well as a lot of good. It's important to help people move into those roles and support them very much.

**Rebecca Surender:** I'm going to, if I may, move on to questions that cluster around our second main theme that we asked people to address and think about. That was how our vision and approach to gender equality can be truly intersectional and inclusive. One very straightforward question we had was what can the students and the University do to facilitate a more intersectional environment, including for non-binary people?

Nikita, why don't you start on that?

**Nikita Ma:** We need both top down and bottom-up approaches, that includes putting more diverse people in important positions.

So as Matt mentioned, which I really liked a point on, having a more diverse hiring panel.

Having a panel that looks like the people you want to encourage hiring and I also think it's important for us to have a mentality change. When we talk about having biases to people, the people we have biases towards are the people we see as minorities, so you don't hear about someone having a bias towards a white man because that's what we see as the majority in society. I think it's really important for us to have more minority representation, so that these people aren't in the minority any more. Just to normalise them in the workplace and in society in general. People will be forced to challenge their own biases and have those conversations. I also think it's really important for us to familiarise ourselves with trans media, so following trans activists, understanding their culture and the issues that exist within those communities and trans causes and I just think it's really important to have those conversations with the people in the room.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thanks Nikita. Matt anything you want to add to that?

**Matt Jarvis:** Just echoing what Nikita said. For the large majority of cases, a lot of it is just listening, listening to people who feel discriminated against or biased against and learning from that.

People in senior positions, or in the University or elsewhere, we are all academics, and we should be interested in learning new things and learning about things we don't know. It seems to me this is a no-brainer for many academics at least. They should be wanting to learn about new things and how to deal with people properly. And how we put in policies to make sure that people, all people are feeling welcome and feel valued in the University. So I think we should all listen and learn fundamentally.

**Rebecca Surender:** I'm going to use my chair prerogative in a comradely way, we are not all academics in this institution, and we have many different roles, and I take your point that academics of all people should be self-critical and aware, but just to make that point before some colleagues interject. Okay, anybody else want to talk

about the issue of intersectional equality and making sure that we're supporting people whose identities, experiences straddle many different statuses?

Jocelyn?

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** A point that I have made many times in the past and apologies to those who have heard it before, it's been shown by McKinsey's (McKinsey & Company) the business company, that in business groups that are the most robust, the most successful and the most flexible are the most diverse. I don't see why the same argument shouldn't apply in universities. So I think that's a very strong argument for having as much diversity in as many dimensions as you can in a group, in a department, in a workplace.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you. Saira, do you want to add anything on that?

**Saira Shaikh:** I think actually, the important thing, or an important thing, is that we've moved the conversation forward to start thinking about intersectionality. For a long time our conversations and our thoughts have been driven by dealing with this category of person or this category of issue, and acknowledging the fact that things do intersect and there can be new issues that flow out from the cutting across of various things.

I guess I feel my own personal experience is both that of someone who is a female, who is a scientist, that is not rare, but still relatively in a small minority. I'm also a person of colour, mixed heritage, that adds another element to that and I guess my world view, my view of how Oxford operates and having either had the fortune or misfortune to be involved in a lot of its governance over time, I have seen how the dynamics can play out and in very mono-cultural settings you can find out things are not particularly energetic or innovative. Whereas they can be in other settings, when you've got a more diverse group.

I really agree with Matt's point about listening actually. In work I have previously done in the divisions and things that I'm also trying to do now, within my own team, it's about listening to people's lived experiences and learning from those. I think we

need more of that and more evidence of that to highlight and show case things as they really are.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you, Saira. We have had an interesting question in the live chat about how we create an inclusive workplace in terms of representation, and I don't know if I'm interpreting this accurately, but it says senior role models are important, absolutely, we need better representation across all backgrounds and communities. I feel gender equality is shifting slowly at high levels and not for all groups of women. I don't know if that means 'but' not for all groups of women, that this is becoming a white female, white woman's space, if we are talking about gender and senior leadership and whether that actually takes us that far forward. Does anybody want to address that?

**Sue Dopson:** I couldn't agree more about the importance of building positive and inclusive cultures, and very often at the heart of that is psychological safety. That people need to feel that it's okay to discuss or learn from, or call out, so finding better ways actually within our setting of reporting discrimination, harassment etc, is also very important. Providing a learning environment which I know sounds very 'Business School-ey', but this psychological safe learn environment is something that I think we need to, I think we've got evidence of that being built, but I think there's much more we could do about unpacking when things do go wrong and learning from them. The diversity point is crucial.

Diversity thinking, we are faced with such incredibly complex problems. The leadership challenges we face in the University and beyond require diversity. We cannot afford not to be diverse otherwise we will not make any progress in these challenges. Completely agree.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you, Sue. It has been articulated to me before that Oxford, compared to other universities, is more uniform, irrespective of the identity, the colour, the gender, sexual orientation of individuals, there is a kind of pressure to present in a certain way and to adopt a particular approach. That may segway a little bit into the next set of category of questions. Does anybody want to comment on that? Are we, as an institution, more guilty of that?

Matt, you have mentioned lots of other institutions.

**Matt Jarvis:** I think, yes, we are, and I say that as a white man as well, but a white man that doesn't naturally fit into Oxford or doesn't think he naturally fits into Oxford. I think that says it all. If a middle-aged white man who is a Professor of Physics says that, we've got serious problems. Because if I'm feeling it, and I'm one of the majority.

**Rebecca Surender:** So the next question is how we unravel that a little bit and presumably, actually having individuals in those spaces will do that. Some of the awareness and critical awareness through the training will do that. But from questions people are saying let's think about strategies, so we've identified what are the challenges, we know our institution reasonably well.

The third category of questions really is, what are the initiatives for tackling these issues, either from within your own neck of the woods, your own department, college, unit, or from what you know other institutions are doing? So I would like us to move to that as the final category of questions.

Let's have a general question to begin with. Maybe we will just open it up with a very general one and some of you touched on these things already.

What initiatives are currently being deployed to overcome some of what we are talking about, gender gaps that particularly widen as seniority increases? Somebody is asking particularly about the number of women PIs, so again that's a research focus. Jocelyn, why don't you start with that. Specific initiatives.

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** Thank you. I'm going to start with a negative because there are spin-offs from some of these initiatives that actually are counterproductive. I was meeting with a young, female research fellow who complained she was getting too many interviews for jobs in universities. She felt quite strongly that those universities were looking at the diversity of the applicants they interviewed, and disproportionately the young women were invited to make the numbers up without any intention of

appointing them. Whilst it was giving her good experience of interviews, it was taking up a hell of a lot of time, as you can well imagine. So strategies like we'll check the numbers, watch the numbers, they can be counter-productive if you have a very small minority and that minority has to make up your numbers as well as making up the numbers back home, and do a job.

So, I think we have to go quite carefully with strategies. I would actually caution that we take it gently, undoubtedly have the intention, but of course physics is probably particularly dire along with maybe some bits of engineering, but just beware of the counter effects of any initiative you have. That said it's always a good idea to check the language, to check the composition of an interview panel, to check the way a job is advertised and all that kind of thing. I think probably that is being done. Whether it's not being done well enough or whether it's not the right thing to do to make a change, I don't know. I don't know if anybody knows. I think we just have to keep trying different things and monitor the results.

**Rebecca Surender:** Do you think there's appetite to regulate on this, to simply mandate and require more than we do?

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** If it was an area where it's reasonable to expect 50-50, yes. If it's not that, then you may be putting the minority under quite a bit of pressure. It's a balance between achieving fairness for everybody regardless of background, race etc., intersectionality, and over burdening the minority, whatever they are, because you want your numbers to look good.

**Rebecca Surender:** Yes, yes. We have heard about the tokenism. Thank you. Sue, do you want to come in on that?

**Sue Dopson:** Just to build on that, again, we have targets of 50% of the MBA being women. I guess when I think about what's helped on the student side, scholarships have helped, particularly on the MBA we are getting 47% of women on 320 students, that's quite big and it's scholarships; the Laidlaw Foundation, they are supporting eight MBAs because COVID is disproportionately affecting women's careers.

On the academic side and researcher side, what we found, Jocelyn, was that it was the long listing where we were having problems. So we won't go ahead for a short listing until we have 50-50 in terms of the long listing. That means my colleagues are working much harder in terms of getting a field and that's been quite an interesting - it doesn't mean to say you go into the short listing, it's not a tokenism, but at least you've made the effort to identify and really work at the field. That I think has been extremely successful.

And I have already mentioned the coaching and mentoring. The Athena Swan, just a complement you, Jocelyn, that was a huge mirror up and it was uncomfortable. It was conversations that didn't normally happen in the Business School across all different levels and whilst it was uncomfortable, it was courageous conversations and out of that, looking at the data in a very creative way. That has been, for my department, an extremely helpful process. Curriculum development, I think you mentioned that, we need to do more in our curriculum about show-casing the diversity challenges. With the Business School, it's full of American case studies which are not appropriate anymore, working on that level we have done a lot of work. One of the things that's striking me is the importance of building confidence amongst women, or diverse populations, to want to go for these things. Certainly in our research, one of the things that we found was a blocker of women, and it's women in this case, stepping up is that they can't imagine all or they suffer from imposter syndrome. There's a lot of work that we need to do to build that imagination and confidence as well as these very helpful initiatives around short listing, Athena Swan etc., etc.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you, Sue. Nikita, before we move on, any particular initiative that you would see as being key in addressing gender inequality?

**Nikita Ma:** I definitely think so. This is also to address the gender attainment gap, because I do see quite a few questions in the Q&A about that. One of the largest initiatives we have this year is working with the VP Women, looking to make taking contraceptive pills an adequate reason for mitigating circumstances for finals. This is definitely something that really affects our body and it really has a lot of serious

impact on women who have to take contraceptives during the final cycles. We hope that this is something we can push through this year.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you very much.

In terms of initiatives, we had some questions about childcare and family friendly policies as a key set of instruments or mechanisms to support women, and Saira mentioned some of that at the beginning. Childcare responsibilities, Sue, do you want to say something on that?

**Sue Dopson:** Well, obviously the flexible working arrangements that have been brought in and phased return to work have been enormously helpful with that. The University maternity policy is very generous, I think. Certainly we have been thinking about the crèches and childcare provision for all our staff. But it is a tough area.

And the other thing is not just childcare, it's increasingly the sandwich generation, you have care for elderly as well.

Obviously, it's critical, but it seems to me the University has made some progress. Saira you were talking about the careers return to work and so forth. There are pockets of really, really good practice. I'm quite proud of what's been going on.

Saira you might want to comment on that.

**Saira Shaikh:** It's been a while since I worked with the Returning Careers Fund, but it certainly was for those who were given awards on their return from a caring break, and typically a child-caring break, they found it instrumental to really get them back up to speed in a much quicker time frame than they would have been able to manage just returning and trying to draw things all together again.

I think in the area of childcare responsibilities, the University's policies and provisions are relatively generous. I think what we might do better at is promoting more of the ideas around shared parental leave. I think that's increasingly becoming something that is acknowledged as something that's useful and it's something that we should

encourage further. Certainly I have seen colleagues in my own teams, male colleagues in my own teams go off and take parental leave provision which is a really good move as managers and leaders we should be supporting those kinds of engagements.

The thing I would like to add in terms of initiatives or strategies that we might take forward, and I don't know if this counts as an initiative, it isn't a strategy per se, but something that I personally feel is something that we might want to think about is just giving better expression to the values that we hold as an institution.

I think our strategic plans, our documentation has littered through it references to respect and dignity and treating each other fairly and things of that nature. Other institutions tend to have a kind of statement of values. I don't know whether that would be the model that we need to have at Oxford, but certainly I think finding a way to better promote and express those values of inclusion and of respect and dignity at work and so forth. They all go some way to help sets the mind set in the right frame from the outset I think. And that's certainly something I think I would like to see happen going forward.

**Sue Dopson:** Just to add to that, one of the observations about the pandemic has been the more flexible working, more understanding of caring, home schooling, all of that and mental health challenges is something we need to understand better and build into the kinds of initiatives you have been commenting on.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you. I would like to have as a penultimate question a slightly different one. We have gone to nuts and bolts and the initiatives and programmes. There's an interesting question that came through in different ways, that basically is asking is this a zero-sum game. So how can we tackle gender gaps without unfairly disadvantaging men or people defining as men?

What are the thoughts on that? Matt?

**Matt Jarvis:** As the man on the panel. So I think bottom line is you can't increase the number of women without decreasing the number of men. There aren't more jobs.

So inevitably, if we want equality some of those people losing out will be working class men. The point being that if things were fair, that wouldn't be a problem. Because you would be fair to everyone. So it's the unfair deal with working class men. I would like to go back to something I heard Jess Wade say, going back to our series in challenges and changes in physics about this point, and paraphrase what she said; anyone with more privilege than someone else will have to take a step back in order to achieve real equality. That includes working class white men and middle class white men, includes white women. Everyone who has some level of privilege will be disadvantaged if we want to achieve equality. But everyone should be on board with that. And recognise that this is for the good of the human race and for everyone if we actually achieve this. So I think as long as we try and do it in a fair and reasonable way, that will happen. I don't think there is a massive conscious disadvantaging of working class men, if I'm being honest. I think there are issues in society that are possibly beyond the control of the University, and all the University can do is operate within the world we all live in, and introduce policies that encourage more applications from people that don't automatically apply to Oxford, and then make sure the interview processes and recruitment processes are fair. So we need to have more applications from those people in order to make it fairer. Then we need to ensure we've got our own house in check.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thanks, Matt. Full and direct answers to that. Does anybody want to come in on this issue, we haven't got very long?

We could have a whole seminar just on this issue in terms of trade-offs and competition between our different constituencies. I don't want to labour the point, but does anybody want to add anything? Is it an inevitable win-lose? I am not seeing the panel jumping in there.

Okay, we've got so many interesting questions that we just haven't had time to do any kind of justice to. Lots of questions about practical issues like attainment gaps. Can I just say on that, the University has done significant amount of work looking particularly at student attainment gaps and if you go to education policy websites you will find reports and lots of information and Saira and I and EDU colleagues, can pass that on if people wish. As the chat keeps saying if we haven't got to your

question, we will do everything we can to follow up individually or in some collective way as soon as we can to pick up on the questions that we didn't address. Please just be patient but we will do that and thank you for those questions. I would like to spend the last five minutes taking a question that was sent in earlier, that is a nice closing question in a way and I'm going to ask the panellists to rapid fire, 45 seconds please if you can, to just address, given all the things we have talked about, given the issue of gender inequality, what would you say to your younger self, that is not defined younger, but at some point earlier, what would you be telling yourself now about how to develop and how to reach your full potential? What advice would you be giving yourself now. I will just go in order. Jocelyn.

**Jocelyn Bell Burnell:** Thank you. I would say to myself, 'Hang in there. Your career will be unorthodox, but you will have fun. And you will probably make it a bit easier for the women following behind you'.

**Rebecca Surrender:** Thank you, Jocelyn. Sue.

**Sue Dopson:** 'You're not on your own, find your own support group, networks are important, not just for getting things done, for influencing but also for learning. Really spend a bit of time reflecting on you, and what motivates you and you know where your challenges are'.

I wish I had known that one of my challenges in terms of personality is agreeableness, which means I like to be right, which gets you into all sorts of trouble. If I had known that when I was 23, I would have been a much calmer, thoughtful, probably well-rested individual. I think understanding who you are and then be yourself with more skill, that's the way to go.

**Rebecca Surrender:** Thank you. Nikita. What are you telling yourself?

**Nikita Ma:** I would definitely say being brave and trying everything that you want to try, even if you don't think you can achieve it. Bearing that in mind when you talk to people in the future, and seeing how your experiences can help shape the experiences of people that are younger than you.

**Rebecca Surrender:** Thank you very much. Matt.

**Matt Jarvis:** Yes, I thought about this, and I guess the thing I would change what I would have done, it wouldn't fulfil my potential more but would have helped more people along the way, is speak up more where I see people being attacked or bullied or in meetings or in conferences, and as a younger person, I didn't do that. Not because I was afraid of repercussions but because I wasn't really thinking. And I think what I've learnt over the past few years, I've become more aware of that, and learnt more, and now I know I can do that and I look out for it. I think all of us, both men and women and non-binary people, should feel comfortable with speaking out when they see things happening that they don't agree with and they think people are being attacked or bullied.

Speak out about it. You will have many more supporters than detractors.

**Rebecca Surrender:** That's really, really clear and helpful Matt, and goes to actually I think Saira's earlier point about institutional values and culture and many would think that private sector is cut-throat and got a particularly unsupportive culture. Actually Sue will know better than others, the culture of academic institutions can leave a lot to be desired on the issues you raise. So thank you very much.

Final word to you Saira.

**Saira Shaikh:** I think having reflected on this question beforehand, I repeated what Sue said and what Nikita has just said. For myself, I think it's about putting yourself in a situation where you are not comfortable. Really stretching yourself sometimes. I think, I don't want to suggest that it's a stereotype for women, but typically it can be said that we're sometimes lacking in confidence, we feel like we have to meet every personal spec criteria when we apply for roles. I think it's true to some extent. I certainly recognise that in myself. Certainly, telling my younger self to be a bit more brave about things and really pushing myself out there.

Also one thing I don't think I have done enough and it picks up on something Sue mentioned about networks and mentoring, one of the weaknesses I do feel we have at Oxford University is in supporting our talent, our staff, and guiding them through the various pathways that there can be. I don't know that I have necessarily followed an obvious track to become an academic registrar at Oxford, I don't think I have. I think perhaps expressing more, repeating myself, giving visibility to those pathways, but also perhaps giving a bit more attention to our own staff in helping them plot a way forward is something I need to do and I think many of us might need to do more in the future.

**Rebecca Surender:** Thank you so much, Saira.

We've come to the end of our time folks. I would like to give really, really heartfelt thanks to our five panellists. All very, very busy people. But I just think this has been a great event and conversation and thank you for your insights, your reflections, but also your honesty and the way you have answered questions.

Thank you so much. I would like to thank Sara Smith and Olivia Allen, colleagues who are behind the scenes supporting this and doing lots of work, but particularly I would like to thank Joanne Fisher and Sally Baden who worked with me throughout this centenary event and have done all the heavy lifting.

Most importantly thank you to the audience, that's a funny word in this panel, for taking time out to participate today.

I've got a note to say recordings and transcripts will be available in links as soon as possible. Thank you all. Hope this has been useful. And it's the start of a conversation, not the end.

Have a good afternoon, everybody.

End.